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# SCIENCE FICTION AGE

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STRANGER  
Breach of the Peace



Dear Mr. Edelman:

While I subscribe to *SF Age* mainly for the stories, the highlight of the March issue for me was Gregory Benford's article on his visit in 1990 with artist Chesley Bonestell.

I imagine it's hard for readers born after that time to conceive of living before the 1969 moon landing or the NASA photographs of the territory throughout our solar system. When I was growing up, the closest thing we had to planetary landscapes and moon rockets was Bonestell's art in places like *Colliers* or Willy Ley's 1949 book, *The Conquest of Space*, which was a Christmas present to me as a child in the '50s in its seventh printing. I still have it. I don't have the magazines, though, and it was a genuine pleasure to see some of the Bonestell art from those reproduced in your magazine.

Articles and layouts like that, I think, give younger readers a glimpse at where science fiction has been before much of it became science fact. Thanks again.

Paul DeLinger

Dear Mr. Edelman:

I'd like to address the questionable difference between science fiction and fantasy, and also explore imagination. The man who said it best is sadly no longer with us. I say sadly, because the world is just now beginning to catch up with his vision. I speak of Philip K. Dick, who once wrote:

"With ordinary fiction, it's 'What If?' But with science fiction, it's 'My God! What If?'"

Even Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." My sentiments exactly. Imagination is our greatest asset. Without it, 99.999 percent of Creation would remain forever obscure. But with it, we can explore Infinity—and learn.

With all due respect to the myriad scientific "—ologists" out there, who studiously avoid the mystical and the spiritual in their quest for knowledge, I very strongly recommend that all the "—ologies" get together. Simply put, dear friends, be "cosmologists"—students of the cosmos. Because science, theology, mysticism, and witchcraft in its many forms, all explore the same universe.

For us yarn-spinners, both established and aspiring, this means the lines of distinction between SF and fantasy can and do blur into nonexistence. Now, perhaps trolls and elves don't exactly "fit" into a story involving artificial wormholes and warp drives, but both are equally fantastic. Yet possible. Not necessarily probable, but possible.

To us, in 1985, travel among the stars is a fantasy. A dream. We want it, but can't have it. So we write stories about it, inventing a virtual reality for ourselves, and for all who may

wish to share it. To us, elves, trolls, dragons, wizards, warlocks, and fair maidens in distress are also fantasy, apparently existing only in our folklore and our dreams. So we fill our bookshelves and our lives with stories about them, living vicariously through the author's vision. And it is imagination that makes them all possible—and which makes them irrevocably, inextricably intertwined. Because, who knows what *really* occupies the infinitely vast universe beyond the reach of our miserably inadequate five-sense-oriented "science"? Do you? I certainly don't. I can only imagine.

Perhaps, should we one day travel to another world orbiting a distant star, there truly shall be trolls and elves and such who live there—and who tell outrageous, frightening tales of bellicose, wantonly destructive anthropoids!

SF or fantasy—what's the diff?

My God, dear friends! My God! *What If?*

Patrick M. Shaw

Dear Sirs:

I'm writing to respond to Gary Morgan's letter in your March issue. In that letter, Mr. Morgan sings the praises of "what if" speculative fiction, and scoffs at "sewer slime" like *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, on the basis that it places "flash and glitter" before story content. I'm surprised that Mr. Morgan enjoys science fiction as much as he apparently does, since his narrow-minded outlook contrasts completely with the vision of SF.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and it would do Mr. Morgan well to realize such. Flash and glitter has its time and place, just as everything does, and in the case of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, that time and place is Saturday morning television. No one ever complained that the *Bugs Bunny Show* lacked story content, or claimed that it paled in comparison to the works of Ernest Hemingway. To do so would be comparing apples to oranges, as is the case here.

Mr. Morgan narrow-mindedly attempts to neatly pigeonhole all stories that meet his criterion (that of "what-if" story content) into the title of science fiction and fantasy (how ironic that his category contains two completely different genres in itself). He should realize that literary categories as broad as "science fiction" by nature contain styles not popular to every reader. Therein lies the strength of free-thinking people everywhere: the open discussion of conflicting viewpoints.

Mark Randall Biery

Readers—please let us know how we're doing at *Letters to the Editor*, Science Fiction Age, P. O. Box 369, Damascus, MD 20872.

MARK HINTZ

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SCOTT EDELMAN

Editor

RONALD M. STEVENS

Art Director

DELINDA CURTIS

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Editorial Assistants

Contributors:

Arian Andrews, Ray Aldridge, Eric T. Baker, Michael Bishop, Ben Bova, Adam-Troy Castro, Doug Chezen, Greg Benford, Ronald Anthony Cross, Vincent Di Fate, Paul Di Filippo, Harlan Ellison, Craig Shaw Gardner, Connie Hirsch, Al Kamajian, John Kessel, Geoffrey A. Landis, Annie Lunsford, Barry Malzberg, Pat Morissey, Resa Nelson, Gene O'Neill, Allen Steele, Martha Soukup, Charles Sheffield, Don Webb, Michael Whelan.

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Circulation Manager

WARNER PUBLISHER SERVICES

International Distribution

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JAMES J. GREGORY ASSOCIATES

Advertising Offices:

MARK HINTZ

Display Advertising

LESLIE MAYNE

Advertising Associate

AMANDA SMITH

Advertising & Marketing Coordinator

441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 22070

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By Scott Edelman

## The branches of Horror and Science Fiction turn out to be close literary relatives.



*Fox's X-Files is the perfect marriage of SF and Horror; this generation's Twilight Zone.*

**R**ECENTLY I ATTENDED THE FOURTH WORLD Horror Convention and, to my surprise, found a great deal of science fiction hidden there. The WHC, held this year in Atlanta, Georgia, is a much younger affair than the movable city of the World Science Fiction Convention. It draws a membership of fewer than a thousand, which results in a more intimate gathering than the meg-meeting that the World-Con has become.

As Lawrence Watt-Evans mentioned in his Essay last issue, often the marketers of fiction would like to keep the genres separate for ease in delivering the product to the target audience, insisting that SF and fantasy and horror are all separate and discrete, with nothing in common. But from the evidence this year at least, the writers as well as fans are determined to tear those walls down.

One visible crossover proselytizer was Harlan Ellison, still high off the news of his quarter of a million dollar contract with White Wolf covering the republication in a uniform edition of thirty-one of his books. Ellison, who has long been vocal about his desire to be known not as a science fiction writer or a fantasy writer or a horror writer but just as a *writer*, has always felt that labels are more than just pointers sending readers in the right direction. Instead of being inclusive, they can often exclude. Some mainstream readers, for example, are afraid of *any* genre label, and a writer once branded may never break through to reach them. When a writer's interests are far-ranging and his scope is broad, as with Ellison, the desire to resist pigeonholing is laudable.

Another writer with similar opinions is Tom Monteleone, who is known primarily for his work in the horror field, such as editing the influential *Borderlands* series of anthologies and writing his controversial Mothers and Fathers Italian Association column. But he is also a writer of SF stories (one of which was published in these very pages). Monteleone and Ellison ended up together on a

heated panel on Self-Promotion in Publishing which grew as loud as any episode of *The McLaughlin Group*.

But these are not the only writers with a foot in two worlds—Adam-Troy Castro, for example, whose series on the space stooges Vossuff and Nimmittz in these pages seem to blend the Marx Brothers and SF. His debut story took place in Hell, and his recent writing occupies both planes—the heavens of SF as well as the hells of horror.

Charlie Grant, distinguished editor of the *Shadows* anthology series, was at the con hot off the success of his novel based on the Fox television series *The X-Files*, itself a horror/SF hybrid. David Prowse, the actor who played the body of Darth Vader (sharing the role with James Earl Jones' voice), was signing photographs of himself, not only as cinematic SF's greatest villain, but also as the monsters of many Hammer horror film classics.

The overlap goes on. Lawrence Watt-Evans, the start of whose latest SF trilogy has been reviewed favorably here, is also the president of the Horror Writers Association, the horror version of SFWA. Robert Bloch, a memorial tribute for whom was led by Harlan Ellison and comic book editorial legend Julie Schwartz, not only is famed in the horror field for writing the classic novel *Psycho* and short story "You're Truly, Jack the Ripper," but he also won the 1969 Hugo for Best SF Short Story "That Hell-Bound Train," and was a frequent contributor to SF magazines and a popular convention speaker. Even I, who love SF and edit the magazine that you now hold in your hands, recently had a short story reprinted as the lead piece in *Best New Horror 4*.

If I had gone around and polled the hundreds of other attendees whom I have not listed, I am sure I frequently would have found a similar love of what some would call separate, distinct, and unrelated genres. So the evidence is clear on the joint attraction of horror and SF. But what is not as easy an issue is: Why?

What brings such opposing forces together in so many minds? There are those who would claim horror to be antithetical to SF; that the basis for SF is that the universe is knowable and neutral to humankind, that the basis for horror is that the universe is basically unknowable, far from neutral, and is instead malign. Perhaps. But I claim that regardless of these contrasting distinctions, horror and SF do have a far more common claim on our imagination.

And that is, each *requires* just that—your imagination. While mainstream literature confines us to the boardroom and the bedroom, to the real places of the world, the metaphors of horror and SF, on the other hand, transport us to places that never were, to the cracks between the world. We are given a cock-eyed look at the real world, seeing it from other planets, through the eyes of vampires, from an incomprehensible future.

Never forget that we who are not bound to the way things really are have more than one avenue of escape. Those of us who choose to inhabit two of them invite you to join us there. □



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# Rock and Roll will never die, but tomorrow may make it unrecognizable.



Richard Kadrey's suicidal rock star inhabits a California transformed into a tropical jungle. Art by Dave McKean.

ONE IDEALISTIC TENET OF EVERYDAY BUDDHISM is embodied in the phrase "secret virtue": the notion of doing good anonymously, without need for personal credit or applause. While it's rather hard to reconcile this notion with publishing a novel—which, of course, has its author's name emblazoned on it, earns or loses money, and is subject to immediate praise and/or disdain—I detect traces of a self-negating "secret virtue" ambition emanating from the work of Richard Kadrey, who by evidence of his two novels to date is no stranger to either streetwise Buddhism, squishy-edged surrealism, or imaginatively informed scientific speculation. The unique cocktail Kadrey dispenses is a heady one; it goes down easily and reserves its kick for when the reader least expects it.

Kadrey's first novel was *Metrolaphy* (1988), part of the distinguished Ace Specials revival, which introduced William Gibson and Lucius Shepard, among others, to the SF field. Kadrey's debut failed to elicit as much attention as these two, in part because it was less revolutionary than the charade-sleek *Neuromancer* (1984) and less idiosyncratic than the swamp-boogie *Green Eyes* (1984). This seems a shame, since the book remains readable and interesting. Familiarity with it facilitates entry to Kadrey's new novel, *Kamikaze L'Amour* (St. Martin's Press, hard-

cover \$20.95, 228 pp.), which represents a growth and maturation of the themes and angles of attack present in the first.

*Metrolaphy* is set two generations into our future, in a brutal and decaying Los Angeles whose ambience is best evoked by taking the set of *Blade Runner* (1982) and subjecting it to some kind of multigeneration Xerox degradation. In this milieu, petty drug dealer Jonny Qaballa experiences and unleashes betrayal, heroism, despair and (possible) self-resurrection. Although the arc of the narrative ostensibly follows the gradual unveiling of some secret governmental and drug lord manipulations behind the larger social scene, the frenetic action basically serves to animate a travelogue through Kadrey's meticulously detailed Dante-esque realm of suffering.

Kadrey's future scores prophetic hits (such as the prevalence of drugged teenage warriors like we've since seen in Liberia and Somalia) and evokes innumerable memorable scenes, perhaps a plethora of such. Two major art forms shape these set pieces, and Kadrey's larger sensibilities: rock music and painting, specific y the dreamy experimentalism of Brian Eno and Tangerine Dream, and the classic surrealism of Dalí, Ernst, and Tanguy.

What mars *Metrolaphy* is an overabundance of cheap quips and relentless violence (at times it seems that simply to say hello to Jonny is to invite certain death) and an overdose of infodumps (a discussion of economic realities during a literal shootout is perhaps the worst example). Zeroing in on this first flaw, author Rudy Rucker in his introduction to *Metrolaphy* says, "I hope there aren't as many killings in his next book."

It is my happy duty to report that Kadrey's second novel, *Kamikaze L'Amour* heeds Rucker's wish. While retaining the painterly eye and down-and-dirty compression of his first book, as well as the shambling nonlinear plot, *Kamikaze* eliminates the defects of that first book and substitutes some impressive strengths.

Three opening quotations establish the parameters of this novel: the first is from the chaos theorist Ilya Prigogine; the second from Salvador Dalí; and the third from the Doors' Jim Morrison. These three strange attractors—chaos theory, art and music—will govern the dizzy oscillations of this book.

*Kamikaze L'Amour* (the title is meant to evoke surrealist André Breton's ideal, *L'Amour Fou*, or Mad Love, which was also the name of a drug in *Metrolaphy*) is narrated in the first person by a rock musician who has adopted the pseudonym of Ryder. Short chapters titled with various dry yet evocative phrases from chaos theory, many of them opening with somber philosophical reflections by Ryder, propel a meandering tale whose organic form is a perfect embodiment of the future depicted therein. And by dispersing with omniscience and limiting the narration to Ryder's limited yet intriguing point of view, Kadrey eliminates the temptation to blast the reader with extraneous information about his imagined world. Our focus is on what occupies Ryder's immediate sen-

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sory sphere, and in fact much of Kadrey's future remains only dimly sketched, unlike the massively annotated world of *Metrolaphage*.

We encounter Ryder after an attempted suicide, not his first. At the peak of his worldwide fame, Ryder has opted out of the music-biz rat race. His fame has been achieved thanks in part to his congenital gift/curse of synesthesia, the ability to "see" sounds as shapes and colors or other sensory inputs. Synesthesia, of course, is a notable riff in SF, most famously in Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), and Kadrey honors the tradition with many subtle and colorful examples, such as "green glass sound" and "...piercing squeals and the fleshy flapping of wings, the latter a falling rain of neon checkboards and the former a hot pink icepick jabbing into the back of my skull."

Ryder can tweak a song until it matches "the color and shape that would make it a hit." But this ability and the decadent pleasures it secures him have pulled on Ryder. He seeks a more chaotic music, entrance into an ideal fractal city of perfect light and sound.

Ryder flees the hospital-cum-sanitarium where his self-destructive actions have landed him (and this duality of suicide versus endurance—the lurking option of kamikaze burnout versus the pull of love—provides another thematic pole around which the book orbits). The city of San Francisco is his chosen hiding place. But although the book is explicitly set a mere five years from now, the San Francisco depicted is one which exists at

odd, magical-realism angles to ours or to any possible near-future city.

What Kadrey postulates, in the form of a daring, never fully explained Ballardian conceit, is that Central America and much of the West Coast of the U.S. has been turned into Amazonia, an extension of the rainforest. Possibly this is Gaea's hypernatural revenge, possibly the action of eco-terrorists armed with the engineered seeds of fast-growing plants. In any case, after a losing battle involving defoliants and napalm, Los Angeles and environs have succumbed to the thick jungle, and San Francisco, further north, exists in a tenuous equilibrium with jaguars, hundred-foot trees, macaws, tapirs, snakes, llamas and catmires.

Whereas the surrealism in *Metrolaphage* stemmed from technology (prostitutes tricked out with multiple genital orifices, gang members boasting pixel-display skins), the omnipresent weird juxtapositions in *Kamikaze* spring from this single organic conceit. (In fact, the congruence of Ryder's world with ours in general, the shared talismans of MTV, a disintegrating Russia, tabloid news, etc., etc., makes the whole book pack a more emphatic punch than the sometimes distant issues of *Metrolaphage*.)

As his fate becomes tied up with that of Frida, a deranged amateur musician, Virilio, a shady expeditor of desires, and Laurie, a dope-running documentary maker, Ryder explores a fabulous world full of refugee screenwriters, enigmatic Indians, sleepwalking victims of a new neurosis, and trolley car pirates. Some-

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**Woman of Wonder: The Contemporary Years**, edited by Pamela Sargent (Harcourt Brace). In the mid-1970s, Sargent's groundbreaking *Women of Wonder* anthologies exploded the misguided myths about women and SF. Now Sargent returns with twenty-one tales to bring us up through the '90s.

**Waking the Moon**, by Elizabeth Hand (Harper Prism). World Fantasy Award Nominee (and frequent SF Age book reviewer) Hand provides a delightful mix for fans of conspiracy theories and college novels, as a group of old friends discover themselves trapped in the secret history of the world.

**Peace**, by Gene Wolfe (Orb Books). Back in print after a ten-year absence from your bookstore, this Chicago Foundation for Literature award-winner focuses on the last days of Alden Dennis Weer, whose imagination has the power to obliterate time and reshape reality.

**Coelstis**, by Paul Park (Tor). The *Starbridge Chronicles* brought Park to prominence. This trilogy, already being hailed as a classic, is topped by a novel both haunting and alien. On a distant star colony, humans and aliens are not always what they seem.

**Dead Girls**, by Richard Calder (St. Martin's). After years of critical acclaim in the UK, Calder's debut novel is available in the United States at last. In a dark cyberpunk future, Primavera is a "dead girl," a new breed of engineered doll-woman, human once, and now trapped in a deadly war.

**Montezuma Strip**, by Alan Dean Foster (Warner Aspect). James Lawson has written numerous short stories about the gritty Montezuma Strip, a world of VR scams and cryogenic kidnappings, and now, surprise—Foster steps out from behind a pseudonym as the true author of these SF cop tales.

**The Magnificent Wif**, by Gordon Dickson (Baen Books). When Earth is finally contacted by a galactic civilization, Tom and Lucy Parent must travel through the universe proving that we are civilized enough to join the community of planets. From the creator of the Dorsai.

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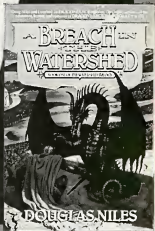
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times the musician wallows in his despair, blunting it with pills and drink. At other times his vision clears and he strives to remake himself and honor his obligations to Frida, whose disappearance eventually involves Ryder in a climactic journey to lost Los Angeles.

By the time fatal violence intrudes at the climax of this book, the reader will find it fully earned and more shocking than the dozens of deaths in *Metaphage* combined. Thus, as much as anything, is the full measure of Kadrey's new stature.

**1968**, by Joe Haldeman, William Morrow and Company, June, 1995, 320 pages, \$22.00.

The year 1968 was a bumper one for American history. In January the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive, which marked the beginning of the end of the Vietnam War. Unknown to the American public, the infamous My Lai massacre took place in March. When its atrocities surfaced in 1968, it was another nail in the coffin of America's prolonged dalliance in Southeast Asia. On the domestic front, disaffection with the American government and its policies reached a new high. Protest, from speeches to marches to sit-ins to homemade bombs—against the war, against the draft, for racial equality—continued to intensify. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated in 1968. Both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions were plagued by

demonstrations, the latter leading to a violent confrontation between police and demonstrators. The ingestion of psychedelic drugs was rampant, launching a counterculture that condemned many of the values of past generations. In terms of the ancient Chinese curse—"May you live in interesting times," with which Joe Haldeman concludes *1968*, the novel—1968, the year, was far and away too interesting. That curse, when adapted to literature—"May you read an interesting book"—fortunately becomes a blessing.

The book *1968* tells the story of John Spider, a k a Spider, who loses his college draft deferment through the incompetence of a teaching assistant, is sent to combat in Vietnam, survives the Tet Offensive, and returns home with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Haldeman is on familiar ground here. Dating back to his first novel, *The War Year*, 1972, and through much of his science fiction, the portrayal of military combat and the individual's response to it have remained a central concern. Yet he manages to bring all of this alive for us again: the horror and absurdity of war, and of this war in particular. His prose is crisp and hard-hitting, full of believable dialogue and the kind of details that count. The plot moves well and takes some surprising and ironic turns. Spider thinks his rifle, which always jams after firing a single bullet, will be the death of him. In fact, an enemy rifle with a similar defect spares his life. The conclusion of the book, though dis-

appointing in terms of our hopes for the characters, is fully satisfying in terms of their dramatic resolution, and very true to life.

As a portrait of a man who survives the war physically but not psychologically—assaulted by grotesque hallucinations, confused about how he was wounded, dropping to the ground every time he hears a loud noise, seriously burning himself with grease in his failed attempt to work at a donut shop—*1968* stands as a compelling and memorable read. Yet 1968, the year, consisted of far more than the Vietnam experience, and one would expect a book by that title to deal with more. Haldeman also delivers on this count, but less effectively than with the war material.

*1968* is divided into 119 chapters, many of them very short, running less than a page. Most of the chapters deal with Spider's travels in a traditional fictional approach. Of the remainder, many read like op-ed columns or historical anecdotes, in which the author speaks directly to the reader. The subjects here range from the M-16 rifle to schizophrenia to Haight-Ashbury to the assassinations of King and Kennedy. These chapters fill out the background of the year, and introduce large expository chunks for the reader in an entertaining fashion.

The other chapters in the book deal with Beverly, Spider's prewar girlfriend, and her new boyfriend, Lee, both of whom become denizens of the flourishing counterculture of

*Continued on page 96*

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## Sylvester Stallone takes on tomorrow as Britain's cult anti-hero, Judge Dredd.



Step aside, *Robocop*! Here come the new futuristic law enforcers—Judge Dredd (Sylvester Stallone), Brisco (Alex Daniel), and Hershey (Diane Lane).

**I**AM THE LAW! WAS THE CATCH PHRASE THAT SUMMARIZED the stance of Judge Dredd, the futuristic crimefighter, when this character first appeared in the pages of *2000 AD*, a British comic magazine, in the 1970s. A mass market hit in Britain, the Judge never won more than a cult following among knowledgeable U.S. comics fans, but his influence has nevertheless been profound. In film, both *Robocop* and *Road Warrior* owe a clear debt to the chaotic vision of the future first put on paper by writer John Wagner and artist Carlos Ezquerro. In comics, *The Punisher* is only the most obvious instance of the Judge's brand of ruthless justice brought across the Atlantic.

With the opening of the major motion picture *Judge Dredd* on June thirtieth, millions of Americans will be meeting the Judge for the very first time, personified by one of our most enduring action stars, Sylvester Stallone. Like all big-budget filmmaking, this one is a crapshoot, with Hollywood backers hoping to make Dredd more popular than *Lance Ili*.

But matters of commercial success aside, the burning question for dyed-in-the-wool Dredd fans (some of whom are already critical of the DC Comics series that debuted earlier this year) is: Will this be the *real Judge Dredd*?

Our investigations show that while much of the mythos remains intact, it is the intention of the filmmakers to deliver something more than the straight-ahead hyperviolence of the comic book's action hero. "What we have is a powerful epic story about a man who has to discover a lot about what he's been defending all

these years," says director Danny Cannon. "It's an incredibly complex story that's bold and rich. It's a science fiction action adventure, but it has enormous dimension, and I think it's a much bolder statement than when it was originally conceived."

Set in the year 2115 A.D. in Mega-City One, *Judge Dredd* takes place in a world where the criminal justice system has been completely "downsized"—replaced by a cadre of "Judges," or legal-minded terminators, who bring order and ruthless efficiency to an unmanageable future world.

"The police are now in the position of being the governing body as well as the judicial and enforcement body of government," explains producer Charlie Lippincott. "It's set up in a situation where they now govern the population of the

United States—so it's not a representative government anymore. They don't vote a police chief in or out anymore—the Judges are the law."

Judge Dredd (Stallone) is in the top rank of these new hybrid lawmen, accustomed to his role as a living personification of rapid justice. In the film, conflict arises when the ruthless criminal mastermind Rico (Arnold Assante) escapes from prison; as part of his plan to take over Mega-City One, he must put an end to the career of the big town's number one cop.

"Basically, you have this Roman-esque fascist dictatorship, of which Dredd is very much the legendary icon," explains Cannon. "What we do is show the insidious corruption of this environment, which breaks Dredd down and banishes him. Then the story becomes about Dredd finding out why this happened and, in the process, finding out who he is and what he is and how he came to be." The film's main concern, says Cannon, is "how this 'justice machine' becomes very aware of his morality and his responsibilities to being human, rather than to the law."

The film also stars Diane Lane as Judge Hershey, who remains dedicated to the law while still remaining loyal to Dredd, despite the circumstances her poor faces. *Saturday Night Live* cast member Rob Schneider (who also appeared with Stallone in *Demolition Man*), plays Fergie, a cheap criminal who inadvertently becomes Dredd's ally and faithful sidekick. The cast is rounded out by Joan Chen, as the beautiful female antagonist Ilsa; Jürgen Prochnow (*In the Mouth of Madness*), as corrupt chief Judge Griffin; and veteran actor Max Von Sydow (*Flash*



# Nature, Music and Magic

## by Don Maitz and Janny Wurts



## An Introduction to the Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium

We would like to introduce you to the most exciting information in Fantasy collecting, and show you a way you can enjoy the many benefits of owning a collection of the most exclusive original artworks by world famous fantasy artists.

The **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** is a select group of serious collectors actively supporting the arts by commissioning the world's foremost award-winning fantasy artists who are given the time, facilities and financial resources to create the art that they always wanted to.

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ists' proposals, our membership votes and our artists are given the opportunity to create a series of original lithographs utilizing advanced continuous tone lithography -- a patented fine art printing process so rare, we have found only one press in the entire world with the capacity to accomplish it.

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# Michael Whelan's



Image size:  
30" x 30"

## Arrival ☆ Path's End ☆ Landing



Image size: 19" x 23"  
© Mithril Publishing, 1994.



Image size: 19" x 23"  
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# Passage to Sanctuary

Members of the **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** benefit from the opportunity to directly participate in the creation of fine fantasy artworks. They share in commissioning one of the rarest and most potentially valuable collections of fantasy art ever created, and gain the economic price benefits only a group can enjoy.

A thirty percent membership discount on **Mithril** print editions and special opportunities to directly purchase original paintings and drawings from our artists combine to make the **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** the premier fantasy collectors' organization.

In the art world, original lithographs can regularly issue for thousands of dollars. Wildlife collectors are eager to invest thousands of dollars for an original lithograph by one of many noted artists.

I chose to participate in the **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** for three reasons: my admiration for the work of Michael Whelan, one of my favorite artists; I like the concept of participating in a collectors group commissioning artwork and promoting fantasy artists; and, I believe that the **Passage To Sanctuary** series represents an excellent bargain when compared to limited edition prints offered in the field.

— **Tim Corbett**  
*The Fantasy Gallery*

Michael Whelan accepted the challenge of being our first artist. He was chosen because of his outstanding talent and technical excellence in the fantasy field. Michael has received the Hugo Award as Best Professional Artist for eleven of the past fourteen years

and is a threetime winner of the World Fantasy Award as Best Artist. In addition, his original illustrations have received top awards in art exhibitions throughout the world. In 1992, Michael received the SuperHugo award as the Best Professional Artist of the past 50 years!

I have a great regard for the artwork of Michael Whelan and will back any project of his to the hilt. He's one of the greats in science fiction. I know that he has been waiting a long time for a project like this and I'm glad to help bring it to fruition.

— **Anne McCaffrey**

Michael Whelan's work has been displayed at museums and galleries throughout the world. Included are the Delaware Art Museum, the Butler Institute of American Art, New York's Hayden Planetarium and Society of Illustrators, Chicago's Brandywine Fantasy Gallery, and the Greenwich Workshop Gallery (publisher of *Dinotopia*). He is currently planning a national tour to exhibit the original works from **Scenes / Visions: The Art of Michael Whelan**.

Michael Whelan has released **Landing**, the third original lithograph in his **Passage to Sanctuary** series. Each lithograph is signed and numbered by Michael Whelan; when purchased as a set, all three original lithographs bear the same signature number. The complete **Passage to Sanctuary** series is available now.

Members of the **Consortium** have chosen to commission Don Maitz and Janny Wurts for their next three original lithographs.

# Nature, Music, and Magic

Don Maltz and Janny Wurts are ready to begin their three-part series on **Nature, Music and Magic**. Don has achieved international acclaim for his award winning fantasy and science fiction paintings. Don's artwork has won top honors in the realm of fantasy and science fiction art. In 1990, he won the Hugo Award for Best Artist along with a special Best Original Artwork Award; he won the Hugo Award for Best Artist again in 1993.

Janny is the best-selling author of the **Empire** series (with Raymond E. Felst), the **Cycle of Fire Trilogy**, and most recently, **Curse of the Mistwraith** and **Ships of Merior** of her series, **The Wars of Light and Shadow**. A World Fantasy Award-winning illustrator, Janny's science fiction and fantasy paintings have been reproduced for paperback books and greeting cards by major publishers worldwide.

For our proposed collaborative effort, a first for us, we decided to pursue the symbolic relationship of threes. Earth, light, and sound with connection to mysticism, the elements, wildlife, and music. Since we are two minds working in concert, we felt a knotwork theme should be subtly incorporated into the three images, and that all three paintings should interrelate, both in theme, and as a set to be set hung together, though each image would stand on its own merits as a separate work of art.

— Don and Janny

Their trio of themes will encompass dawn, midday, and dusk; the three earthly elements water, earth, and air through the imagery of ocean, trees, and sky. Three categories of wildlife as in fish, forest

creatures, and winged birds. Three types of sound as in flute, stringed instruments, and percussion wind chimes. The magic, the mysticism, the sense of the unseen in nature, and the knotwork would be threads and a journey in imagination running through each painting.

## How You Can Join the Consortium

The **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** is now accepting applications for new members. Membership has never been easier or more rewarding.

Acting as a group, the **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** commissions world-renowned fantasy artists. We allow each artist the time, facilities and resources required to create the finest original lithographs ever produced in the fantasy field. And, we do this at a price you can afford!

There are two ways to participate in membership and save \$300 to \$600 dollars when ordering **Nature, Music, and Magic**:

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You may also join the **Consortium** by ordering Michael Whelan's **Passage to Sanctuary**. For more information, or to order either series, please contact Membership Director David Mogul at (404) 662-7574.



The unmasking of Dredd causes some concern to die-hard fans but with an icon like Stallone it was as important to show his face as to develop Dredd's character.

Gordon), as former chief Judge Fargo.

"I tried to give the film an international importance," says Cannon. "I was trying to be timeless while creating a classic scenario incorporating ideas concerning the Third Reich, certain pagan ideals, and even the Roman Empire. These things in the movie have really happened in our history."

Bringing science fiction in on a reasonable budget is a difficult endeavor nowadays, as Cannon was well aware when he first took the reins of *Judge Dredd*. "Obviously this film could have been the most expensive film ever made, but one thing I'm good for after making a lot of low budget stuff is that you respect money, you respect deadlines, and you put it on the screen," says Cannon. "So what could have been *Waterworld* is not. We knew what we needed to succeed and we're getting that, and luckily it hasn't gotten out of control."

Filed over a ninety-eight-day shooting schedule last summer at London's Shepperton Film Studios, Cannon has assembled an impressive team of behind-the-scenes wizards to create the film's futuristic visuals. Production designer Nigel Phelps (he was Anton Furst's assistant on *Batman*) accompanies set decorator Peter Young (*Batman*), art director Leslie Thompson, and costume designer Emma Porteous (*Aliens*) in order to bring the Gothic, utopian Mega-City One environment to life. Jess Williams (*Alien 3*) serves as special effects supervisor and, Cannon says, his crew has crafted some groundbreaking visuals that will even impress the buffs who think they've seen it all.

"I think we've got the biggest model city ever built—it's huge," says Cannon. "We're also digitally compositing live action onto our models, so you'll see real traffic and people inside our models, to make it a much more believable environment. We're also moving characters off of stage sets and into digital sets, sometimes within the same shots. What

we're hopefully going for is that you won't notice that it's an effect at all. It will be so believably done that the minute you view the city itself, you will accept it as a natural environment."

While *Judge Dredd* has been the object of fan speculation for just over a year, the project has been on the drawing board for well over a decade. The comic property first roused Lippincott's interest during its years of peak popularity in the late '70s. Having marketed and merchandised *Star Wars*, Lippincott was well aware of the qualities that could make *Dredd* a science fiction franchise, and he began to pursue the rights, which he finally secured in 1984.

"Most studios weren't interested in science fiction and comic books, especially in those days," explains Lippincott, who soon decided that his best shot at *Dredd* lay in pursuing the project as an independent feature.

"Since I had marketed a few science fiction films, I knew that, for the most part, the driving forces behind major science fiction films were individuals," he adds. "Just look at George Lucas and *Star Wars*. If you went to a studio, you would probably get lost in development, which I did not want. Just last year there were over 700 projects in development at Warner Bros. One project gets more attention over another depending on how hot you are at the moment, and unless you're a forceful producer with a hot track record or are a hot director or a hot actor, your project is not going to get the attention. You're going to get lost in the shuffle. And if you're in development with something and it goes on hold, it means you're going to have to go into turnaround, and, if you still wish to see it made, you have to buy out the studio. So going with a studio usually makes it a major problem."

Through its first years, *Dredd* went through various incarnations, with at least five screen-

*Continued on page 63*

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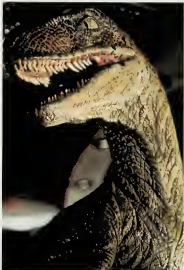
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## Scientists will someday be able to rearrange the building blocks of life.



The most famous fictional instance of gene manipulation is in the film *Jurassic Park*, which used it to bring back the dinosaurs.

**I**N THE FILM *JURASSIC PARK*, SCIENTISTS USED MODIFIED DNA TO RESTORE EXTINCT DINOSAURS TO LIFE. HERE IN THE REAL WORLD, SCIENTISTS ARE AT THIS VERY MOMENT CHARTING THE FIRST ROAD MAPS FOR ALTERING AND CREATING HUMAN LIFE. WE BROUGHT TOGETHER TWO KNOWLEDGEABLE SF WRITERS TO DISCUSS THIS CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC AND ITS INEVITABLE CONCLUSIONS.

Although trained as a mathematician and physicist, Charles Sheffield writes often about biological subjects. He notes that twenty of his short stories involve genetic modification, selective breeding of humans, and biological modification of humans. Lawrence Watt-Evans isn't a scientist, but he's closely related to several. He's also a prolific writer of science fiction novels, including *The Chromosomal Code* and, most recently, the *Three Worlds Trilogy: Out of this World, In the Empire of Shadows, and The Reign of the Brown Magician*.

**SF AGE:** Where exactly do we stand today in terms of mapping the human genome?

**SHEFFIELD:** I would start in 1945, I think, when Schrodinger, who is most famous for his work in quantum mechanics, published a book called *What is Life?* He suggested that the genetic code is actually a true code, in the sense of an ordinary code which can be interpreted as a series of symbols. Now, he didn't know where the code could be found. He thought it was in proteins, because

people didn't know then that DNA was the essential thing. But Schrodinger started everybody thinking, there's a coding process at work that codes for the production of organisms. The next big step was in '53, when Watson and Crick published the structure of DNA, showing how it could be used to replicate a copy of itself, and proposing that this is what actually happens when an organism reproduces. For the past forty years, everybody has embellished the theme that DNA carries the essential information about an organism and, therefore, if you know in detail the structure of DNA, and if you know the order of the nucleotide bases in DNA, then you know the organism. So the idea of mapping the genome in one sense began in '45. In another sense, it began in '53. And today we're following up on those original suggestions that DNA is a code, and if you know how to read that code, you will know everything about the creation of an organism. Now, the creation of an organism is not what's in the organism's memory, which is learned. Knowing the DNA sequence lets you create, if you'd like, a newborn baby. At that point, the DNA is finished, and other things, like learning processes, take over.

**WATT-EVANS:** You can actually trace it back a lot further than 1945, back to the first studies of chromosomes. Back to Gregor Mendel. But things have certainly sped up in the past fifty years.

**SHEFFIELD:** For instance, we pretty much know the complete mapping, the genetic structure of *E. coli*, which is one of everybody's favorites, the bacteria you have inside your innards. We have pretty much mapped out yeast, if you happen to be interested in yeast.

**WATT-EVANS:** I know several brewers who are.

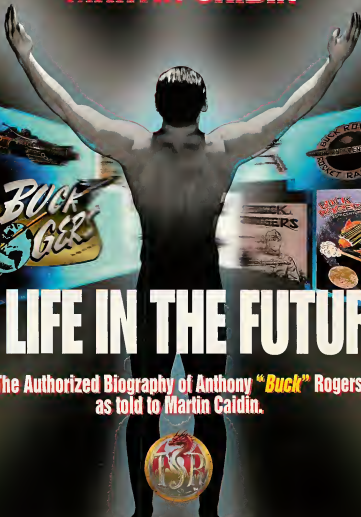
**SHEFFIELD:** We've almost mapped the structure of nematode worms. We've got a lot of information about mapping the mouse genome, but the human genome map is still probably ten years away. That's not bad, because there are 3 billion separate nucleotide bases to map. I've used those words before. I should explain what nucleotide bases are. The fundamental encoding unit is one of four nucleotide bases, which are adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine. The order in which they are strung out along the DNA molecule defines the genome. Once you know that order completely, you know the genome. So we've got 3 billion of those to plot out for a human being. Bacteria are considerably simpler, they have only a few thousand bases. That's why some bacteria have been mapped. I forget what the Genome Project now sets as its goal, but by 2005, we should have the whole thing mapped. And I guess what you're asking is: Should we be worried, or should we be delighted? I will be delighted. I'm not worried. I consider this as very important information that we must have.

**WATT-EVANS:** Simply because you've got something mapped doesn't mean you have to start rearranging it, after all.

**SHEFFIELD:** No, but you will know where many diseases originate, for instance.

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**WATT-EVANS:** They've already got some of them.

**SHEFFIELD:** We already had some even without the mapping—where Down's syndrome lies, for instance, on the twenty-first chromosome. But when you have all the mapping done, you can then go in and propose fixes for Huntington's disease and Down's syndrome. I don't know if you can do Down's syndrome by a fix like that, but there are many others, like Tay-Sachs disease, which is caused by the lack of a specific enzyme, hexosaminidase. Those things should be able to be fixed up. But after that you get into what I think the popular press worries about. They call it "playing God." Should you be allowed to go in and redo what nature did? And I claim—yes. Definitely.

**WATT-EVANS:** If you're going to claim that we shouldn't mess with nature, we wouldn't wear eyeglasses. I don't, but you do.

**SHEFFIELD:** This is more basic than a simple fix to your own body. This changes the developing organism. And some religions say you can't do that. What else can you do that's not simply a fix-up? Are you allowed to fiddle around with the code to produce what you believe to be a superior being?

**SF AGE:** What have we done, if anything, so far with the mapping we've done of lesser creatures? Have we made a superior yeast? What have we actually been doing besides the gaining of knowledge itself?

**SHEFFIELD:** For example, we've been

producing tomatoes that don't rot so quickly after they're harvested, but that's a very minor gain. We can do rather simple fixes at the vegetable level to make foods that are more resistant to wilt or more resistant to drought. A lot of people say that's immoral. But farmers have done it by natural selection, just picking the thing that worked better, for probably five thousand years. There's nothing really new there. But people like Jeremy Rifkin say this is all an abomination and an enormous danger, a tampering with something that could destroy us. I don't take much notice of him, but those people are around. And he's not that unusual, he's just a bad example.

We think of genetic modification as relatively new, though as Lawrence points out, Mendel set down the basic rules for genetics in the middle of the nineteenth century. Then nobody read his work. People ignored it for forty years, until around 1900, when other workers, like Hugo DeVries, rediscovered the results. They went back and discovered that Mendel had done it. And very interestingly, they gave him the credit. So we remember Mendel, not DeVries. But Darwin, when he was publishing his *Origin of Species*, was very much troubled because he didn't have a genetic base for what he was doing. People criticized him by saying, well, wouldn't any change that happened become diluted? And he had no answer. He didn't realize that these were heritable traits that he was dealing with. If he had been able to talk to Mendel, back in

about 1860, then his worries about the dilution of the changes would have gone away. But that had to wait until 1900. People have been doing genetic things for a long time. Is there someone further back than Mendel?

**WATT-EVANS:** You could always just go back to good old animal husbandry. Breeding animals for specific traits. I mean, farmers didn't know why it worked, but they have had a pretty good knowledge of how it works for a long, long time.

**SHEFFIELD:** Recombinant DNA methods for producing improved stocks is just an efficient way of doing what the farmers did. Actually, many of the things that the farmers create could not survive in the wild. But nobody seemed to worry about that.

**WATT-EVANS:** They didn't intend them to live in the wild.

**SHEFFIELD:** No, they intended them to live on farms. The idea of the superpig and so on. We three seem to be very sanguine about all this. I don't hear any worries of coming difficulties or danger.

**SF AGE:** Let me raise that issue, because I think that the human animal is somewhat predisposed these days to be suspicious of scientists. At the same time, once you let the genetic genie out of the bottle, you can't make it get back in. So we have the two conflicting issues of our eventual tinkering versus the great suspicion. How will these two collide?

**SHEFFIELD:** Suppose it becomes really easy to do. In other words, you get the

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genome well-mapped, and changing the genome becomes a fairly trivial exercise. You can program your modification on your PC of the future, and you can do it with equipment that the average individual can afford. Then you will get all sorts of weird modifications, because parents already try to make their children into something that the parents feel is desirable. Some parents will try to make their children into geniuses. That's been going on, I suspect, for thousands of years, certainly for hundreds. And people will do other things, too. They'll say, 'I want my child to be a superathlete, or a superdancer, or supersmart, or super in some particular way.' And they will produce distortions of the ordinary human genome to do that. They will probably not get what they want.

**WATT-EVANS:** Because almost all these traits aren't just single genetic traits, they're a complex of interactions in the genome. There isn't any one gene for violin-playing ability. It's a set of different traits that interrelate in specific ways. Figuring out how to do that is going to be extremely difficult, and you'll need a lot more than just a map.

People will probably continue to pick things like athleticism or musical talent or mathematical ability or whatever, and it seems to me that anyone who does that is going about it the wrong way, because what they're trying to do is produce a happy, successful kid. It seems if you want a happy kid, you should do something to produce a happy kid. Don't bother with the intermediate steps.

**SF AGE:** Is there a happiness section to be mapped on the genome?

**WATT-EVANS:** That's an excellent question. It certainly seems to me that some people are just naturally gloomy. And others are much more cheerful. Part of that's upbringing, but I suspect that some of it really is genetics.

**SF AGE:** So if Prozac is meant to cure a chemical imbalance, then will the wave of the future be to track that chemical imbalance to the source and just tinker with it in utero?

**WATT-EVANS:** I hope so.

**SHEFFIELD:** We probably won't be allowed to. One of the questions in all of this is how much tinkering around you are allowed to do before other people say that you don't really have the right to control what your offspring is. Already we have laws to protect children against abuse. In fifty years we may have laws that protect unborn children against in utero genetic modifications, which they may find to be abusive. I don't know what they are though.

**WATT-EVANS:** I can't see how removing any chance of depression would be considered abusive.

**SHEFFIELD:** As you said, you have to know it only does that. Also, because the particular trait is not a single point on the whole genome map, but rather the interrelation of many factors on the genome map, you will try to make a person who won't be severely depressed, but you will do other things that you don't know about and you find out about

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only when the child is born. I'm sure that nobody, even in fifty years, will understand the way in which all the pieces of the genome interact. Should we talk a bit about introns and exons? Are you familiar with those? You've got the human genetic code, and it's got 3 billion base pairs along it. But it turns out that about 90 percent of those don't seem to do anything. They're called introns, and seem like lumps of junk DNA. The bits that actually produce proteins are called exons (with one x to avoid trademark problems). A lot of people say this is not true, the introns really do something, they have a role but we don't know yet what the role is. So if you removed the introns, you would not get the same organism as if you left the introns in.

WATT-EVANS: I would love to see that tested.

SHEFFIELD: Well, in a sense it is tested, because bacteria don't have introns. So maybe you'd get a human who is like a bacterium. That's not a very good answer. A lot of people now say, well, the introns are doing things, but they're doing things subtly, second order things, and we haven't figured out what they are.

WATT-EVANS: One thing about introns is that they tend to be the same pattern over and over and over again, which is why most people assume they don't do anything.

SHEFFIELD: Yes, it's the same pattern, or an inverted piece or something like that. But that doesn't mean that overall, the separation of the exons is not very important. In other words, the precise type of pattern may be important.

WATT-EVANS: And we don't know that.

SHEFFIELD: Even when we have the genome, we won't know everything. We'll know what the genome looks like, but we won't know what the pieces do, or how they interrelate.

WATT-EVANS: An intron might be like a zero in a number. There's a big difference between 103 and 1003. We don't know whether it makes a difference or not. My wife did her undergraduate research on repetitive patterns in cow DNA, and there were a lot of them. Cow DNA is at least 50 percent introns.

SF AGE: Let's look into the future. I assume that we will work on lower animals first before we get to people. What are we going to do first? Make a kinder, gentler dog? A turkey with an even bigger breast?

WATT-EVANS: We will almost certainly do animals that produce more flesh for food. We already do everything we can to fatten up chickens and cows and so forth, and I can't imagine that we'll stop short of tinkering with their genes to do it, because we've never stopped short of anything else.

SHEFFIELD: Of course, the feathers on today's chicken or turkey are probably not useful, are they? At least I don't know what they do with them. I assume that they're not as useful as the flesh.

WATT-EVANS: People used to use them to stuff pillows.

**SHEFFIELD:** A featherless chicken might be the sort of thing you could produce easily. But the chicken is not able to comment on these things. Which is why the real test comes when you can ask another human how it feels to have no hair, to take the chicken analogy.

**SF AGE:** Will these creatures be patentable?

**SHEFFIELD:** I think so.

**WATT-EVANS:** Probably.

**SHEFFIELD:** A few years ago there was an outcry because a company was forming what specifically declared it would patent the portions of the genome map that it created. There was a big outcry because this was contrary to the general scientific principle. Usually, if I discover something and you want to know it, I'll tell it to you. That's the normal way science is done. But in this case, this group was saying, we are going to patent and hold secret these genome maps that we've created. It doesn't mean that nobody else can map that portion of the genome. But it means the company is ahead of the rest of the market for the possible applications.

**WATT-EVANS:** Wait. If you patent something, you can't keep it secret.

**SHEFFIELD:** But nobody else can use it.

**WATT-EVANS:** Right. It's not secret, but it's proprietary.

**SHEFFIELD:** I would have thought, by the way, that the appropriate thing would have been to copyright it. It's actually a description of something, a written description of the nucleotide base structures. Anyway, people got very upset by that. That was about six years ago.

**WATT-EVANS:** Getting back to what we might do with genetic manipulation once we've got it. One thing that I worry about is that we agree that food animals we'd tamper with immediately. But I wonder whether we'd tamper with pets, because the obvious thing to do is to make them more intelligent. And then you start getting into the question of when they stop being pets and start being people. And I think we might run into ethical problems with that sooner than we do with actually tampering with human DNA.

**SHEFFIELD:** Remember that chimps and humans share 98 percent of the same DNA already, so a little infusion of human DNA to the chimp might give you something just smart enough to work as a slave. But then the question will come, is that actually a chimp or a human. And what will the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals say to all this? Where do you stop? You can't mix the DNA of chimps and humans to make a superchimp. But are you allowed to mix the DNA of clams and oysters to make a superoyster? How far down the chain do you go? Steven Gould would object to that word "down." He says all organisms should be considered equal. But how far from humans do you go before it's all right to experiment? The tomato seems to be fair game. You're allowed to modify the tomato. You're probably not allowed to modify a chimpanzee, at least with human DNA.

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But somebody will probably do it.

**WATT-EVANS:** Oh, almost certainly.

**SF AGE:** Once we start tinkering with the human genome, how will we do it? Do we take the fertilized egg, make the change right there at a microscopic level, cut something out before any division occurs?

**SHEFFIELD:** You will probably introduce into the cell—the fertilized egg—something called restriction enzymes. Restriction enzymes cut the DNA chain at certain places. And you'll then go in, perhaps with a virus, and replace a piece. A virus is simply another piece of DNA. So you go in with a short piece of DNA that replaces the DNA that you don't like. To do that, you have to know exactly whereabouts it is to go, and how it will tie together.

But I think one of the things that will come out, very early, is that when we know what the genome looks like, we'll know a lot more about why organisms age. There's a suggestion today that organisms age because the chromosome DNA sort of unravels at the ends. They get split ends. The things at the end of the DNA molecules are called telomeres. It turns out that an ordinary cell can only reproduce a certain number of times before the process goes wrong. What happens is the DNA starts to unravel at the ends. But cancer cells don't have that problem, and they can reproduce indefinitely. I think that when we know what DNA looks like, in detail, and we know what the telomeres do, we'll know why organisms age. And then comes the question, should you try to produce somebody who can live to be a thousand. Is that a practical question or an ethical one? I don't know the answer. Would you want your children to live to be a thousand if you had the choice of giving them that as a gift?

**WATT-EVANS:** Yes.

**SHEFFIELD:** I'm not sure I would. Remember what happened to Tithonus. He asked for the gift of immortality, and he was given it by the gods. But he was not given the gift that would stop him getting older. He just constantly aged and was consumed by his own immortality. So I want my kids to live to be a thousand, but a thousand in good health, functioning normally. I don't want them to age at the same rate as you and I age, so that when they're 200 years old they're blind, deaf, and incapable of speech.

**SF AGE:** Already, one of the most controversial issues in this country happens to be about tinkering with fertilized eggs. When this works in the future, assuring it does, what will be happening? Will we have a young couple trying to make their way through a crowd of protesters so the fertilized egg can have the DNA for Tay-Sachs or retinitis pigmentosa removed? When this finally is introduced, as it inevitably is with these things, what's going to happen?

**SHEFFIELD:** It probably won't happen in this country. It will happen in a country that has different views about its priorities. A country like China or France might say it's

worthwhile. They seem to have a very cool and logical approach. They might decide that for the general benefit of the public it is worth sacrificing a few unborn individuals. After all, some countries have very different attitudes toward the use of fetal tissue. So those countries may initiate experiments to see what happens when you try to create an organism that's a superior being in some sense. If it works, then China or France may move far ahead of the United States.

**WATT-EVANS:** And if it doesn't work, you have another Romania.

**SHEFFIELD:** Well, any country is likely to see more failures than successes. But we are becoming bogged down in litigation on almost anything involving experimentation on humans. The next step is the bogging down on experimentation in animals. It's already very difficult. But that doesn't mean that the rest of the world will walk to that particular beat. They may say, well, there's ten of those unborns, and a billion of us, and it's a worthwhile risk to see what happens. That's actually what scientists are always accused of, right? More interested in experiments than people.

**SF AGE:** So you're saying we'll be passed by? Do you think that we won't be able to do that in this country?

**SHEFFIELD:** I think we'll drown in lawyers before we drown in ethical considerations. I can see a possibility that everything will be tied up in the courts, and we will be bypassed. I don't mean we'll lose, because it may be that the country that undertakes the experiment comes to an unfortunate end. Breeding someone super-smart could be a very dangerous thing to do.

**WATT-EVANS:** I don't know. It doesn't seem to me that the hyper-intelligent are much of a threat nowadays.

**SHEFFIELD:** Hyper-intelligent if they also happen to be paranoid and megalomaniac? If you take that to an extreme, they might find it very easy to manipulate the whole system of the country. The danger is when we do something to the genome that you think has a nice beneficial effect, like curing astigmatism, it turns out that there's also a second order effect, and you don't have arms or legs.

**WATT-EVANS:** One of the more obvious ones is if you cure sickle cell anemia, you eliminate resistance to malaria.

**SHEFFIELD:** If I were king and was allowed to rule the world for a while, I would permit any experiment that looks as if it would help with human disease. I would also permit experiments on animals that do not lead to suffering for the animal. I can see no reason not to do that. I would probably breed a more stupid dog, since I consider stupidity in dogs to be a virtue. You don't want a smart dog. It's like a smart politician. You don't want a smart politician. You know, if we could just find the part of the genome that turns a person into a politician or a lawyer and apply the right restriction to snip it out—but I guess that's just wishful thinking. □



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By Mike Resnick

# It's not that long a road from new fan to SF Elder Statesman.



At SF conventions, Mike Resnick learned how to build a better Bag-Eyed-Monster. Cover art for *Paradise* was painted by Michael Whelan.

SO I'M SITTING THERE IN WINNIPEG, RESPLENDENT in my tuxedo, waiting for Bob Silverberg to announce the winner of the Best Editor Hugo. He goes through the names: Dillow, Dozsis, Resnick, Rusch, Schmidt. He opens the envelope and reads off Kris Rusch's name, and suddenly I am walking up to the stage. Bob is sure I thought he called out my name and looks like he is considering clutching the Hugo to his breast and running off with it (although that is actually a response common to all pros when they are in proximity to a Hugo). Finally he sighs and hands it over to me, and I start thanking all the voters.

What am I doing here, I wonder, picking up a Hugo for a lady who is half my age and has twice my talent and is drop-dead gorgeous to boot? How in blazes did I ever get to be an Elder Statesman?

Well, it began in 1962, which, oddly enough, was not just last year, no matter how it feels. Carol and I had met at the University of Chicago in 1960. We'd gone to the theater on our first date and wound up in the Morrison Hotel's coffee shop, where we talked science fiction until they threw us out at five in the morning.

We got married, and 1962 rolled around, and so did a future Campbell winner named Laura...but the second biggest event of the year came when Ace Books started pirating a bunch of Edgar Rice Burroughs novels, and one of the books had a little blurb on the inside front cover extolling ERB's virtues, and it was signed "Camille Cazedessus, editor of *ERB-dom*." You didn't have to be a genius to figure out that the ERB part stood for Edgar Rice Burroughs. A whole magazine devoted to one of my favorite writers? I could barely wait until the next morning, when I took the subway downtown and entered the Post Office News, Chicago's largest magazine store. I looked for *ERB-dom* next to *Time*, *Life*, *Look*, *Newsweek*,

and *Playboy*. Wasn't there. I looked for it next to *Analog*, *Galaxy*, and *F&SF*. No dice. Wasn't anywhere near *Forbes* or *Fortune* or *Business Week* either.

So I went up to the manager and told him I was looking for *ERB-dom*, and he checked his catalogs and told me there isn't no such animal. I grabbed him by the arm, dragged him over to the paperbacks, pulled out the operative Burroughs title, turned to the inside front cover, and smote him with a mighty "Aka!"

So he promised to get cracking and find out who published this magazine and start stocking it, and I returned to our subterranean penthouse (i.e., basement apartment) to await the Good News.

Which didn't come. Finally, I looked at my watch and it was half-past 1962 and there was still no sign of *ERB-dom*, so I wrote to the editor, Miss Cazedessus (until then I'd never heard of a *guy* named Camille), in care of Ace Books, and a month later the first five issues of *ERB-dom* arrived in the mail, the very first fanzines I had ever seen, along with a long, friendly letter that constantly used the arcane term "Worldcon." By the time I learned what it meant, I'd already missed the 1962 Worldcon, which was held 12 miles away.

Something else happened that year. We were living at the corner of North Shore and Greenview in the Rogers Park area of Chicago, and right across the street from us was this old apartment building, and on the third Saturday of every month, strange-looking men and women congregated there. They had unkempt hair and most of them were either ninety pounds overweight or fifty pounds underweight. We studied them through the window and decided they were members of SNCC or CORE, which were pretty popular organizations at the time, and that they were meeting there to figure out how to dodge the draft, and that the books they constantly carried were pacifist tracts.

We had to go all the way to Washington D.C. a year later and attend Discon I to find out that they were not draft dodgers (well, not *primarily*, anyway) but rather Chicago fandom, and that they had been meeting eighty feet from our front door for two years.

So I wend my way back through the audience, and I find my seat, and I hand Kris Rusch's Hugo to Carol, because I am also up for Best Short Story, and I think I've got a better chance at this, and when I run up to accept the award, it will look tacky to already be carrying a Hugo.

Guy Gavriel Kay begins reading off the nominees, and suddenly I realize that I am not nervous at all, that this is becoming very old hat to me. I have been nominated for nine Hugos in the past six years. I have actually won a pair. Worldcons are very orderly things: you show up, you sign a million autographs, you get a different editor to pay for each meal while you line up your next year's worth of work, and then you climb into your tux and see if you've won another Hugo.

It's gotten to be such a regular annual routine, you sometimes find yourself idly wondering: was it *always* like this? Then you think back to your first Worldcon, and

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you realize that no, it was not always like this....

Right off the bat, we were the victims of false doctrine.

Everyone we knew in fandom—all six or seven of them—told us the Worldcon was held over Labor Day weekend.

The problem, of course, was their definition of "weekend." We took a train that pulled out of Chicago on Friday morning and dumped us in the basement of our Washington D.C. hotel at nine o'clock Saturday morning. At which time we found out that the convention was already half over.

Caz, who was not a Miss at all, met us and showed us around. Like myself, he was dressed in a suit and tie; it was a few more Worldcons before men wore shirts without jackets or ties, even during the afternoons, and every woman—they formed, at most, ten percent of the attendees—wore a skirt.

When we got to the huckster room—twenty plus dealers (and selling only books, magazines, and fanzines; none of the junk that dominates the tables today)—I thought I had died and gone to heaven. The art show had work by Finlay and Fress and Emsh and even Margaret Brundage; only J. Allen St. John was missing from among the handful of artists whose work I most admired.

In the afternoon we went to some panels. They were pretty interesting. For example, there was one with Willy Ley, Issac Asimov, Fritz Leiber, L. Sprague de Camp, Ed Emsh, and Leigh Brackett, on the topic "What Should a BEM Look Like?" (I have a copy of the *Discon Proceedings*, a transcript of the entire convention published by Advent, and to this day when I need a new alien race, I reread that panel transcription and invariably come up with one.)

Caz introduced us to Fred Pohl, Murray Leinster, and even John Campbell himself, and then went off to sell some subscriptions. A sweet old guy in a white suit saw that we were new to all this and moseyed over and spent half an hour with us, making us feel at home and telling us about how we were all one big family and inviting us to come to all the parties at night. Then he wandered off to accept the first-ever Hall of Fame Award from First Fandom. When they asked if he was working on anything at present, he replied that he had just delivered the manuscript to *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*—yeah, it was Doc Smith—and at that point he received the second-biggest ovation I have ever heard of at a Worldcon. (The biggest came thirty years later, when Andy Porter broke a twelve-year losing streak and won the semi-prozine Hugo with *Science Fiction Chronicle* in 1983.)

After dinner we attended the masquerade ball, which in those days was truly a ball and not a competition. There was a band, and everyone danced, and a few people showed up in costume, and every now and then one of them would march across the stage, and at the end of the ball they announced the win-

*Continued on page 101*

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**L**EO GERONCLEROS SAT DOWN ON the road and cried.

Below, the city stretched, a charred scatter of remnants, struts supporting nothing out of gray-black ash, broken here and there by a splash of color—a tent or something similar. The civic dome still stood, cracked, and a sprawling tent city huddled against it.

Three years gone and this was all that remained of his home. His last view of Panthea had been sheets of rolling black smoke rising up in answer to the alien bombardment. Nothing had been rebuilt that he could see. Through the haze of tears it seemed dreamlike, unreal. Leo blinked, hard, and the brilliant colors of the refugee camp stabbed at him. So bright, so desperate.

"Your Honor?"

Leo rubbed his nose on the sleeve of his robe and looked up at his escort. The girl watched him uneasily, sharp lines in her young forehead, dark eyes softened now by an unfamiliar concern. Her body was hard and angular, her energy evident even in the shapeless gray-green utilities she wore. The only thing truly casual about her was the way she let her rifle rest in the crook of her arm, like an old musical instrument played into absorption with her deeper self. She was younger, Leo believed, than his wife had been.

"Sorry," he said, rising. He waved at Panthea. "I didn't know..."

"It's only been four months since we retook it. We're still trying to find all the bodies. But we've got power now."

"Have you found any Intruder corpses yet? I'd very much like to see one."

The girl gave him a puzzled look, then shook her head. "No. There haven't been any Intruder corpses. Only their machines."

She continued on down the road toward Panthea. After a few moments, Leo followed.

# AFTER

The planetary war was over. The Intruders had vanished. But more fearsome enemies still remained....

BY MARK W. TIEDEMANN

*Illustration by Todd Lockwood*





The road was roughly paved. It wound through the hills south of the city. Leo had seen many caves, some still occupied by partisans operating communications and observation posts. Here, above Panthea, it finally left the cover of the thick forests. It was late autumn. The unblocked sun felt good on his head, but the wind from the open plain to the west made him wish for a jacket. All he had been given by the partisans who had found him were boots. For that he was very glad; his bare feet would never have managed this harsh surface. But the thin robe he wore was hardly sufficient.

**A**T THE FIRST CHECKPOINT LEO HAD BEEN brought to, his name had been run through a computer. When they had verified his identity and that he was an authentic Returned, the girl was assigned to escort him. She had said little in the six kilometers since. Leo had been disinclined to talk much; the countryside was riddled with outposts and the forest was rife with wariness.

The road leveled out and they passed through the outer sections of the city. Up close, the destruction looked like the work of careless giants who broke everything they touched. Then the smell hit him and Leo caught his breath.

The girl watched him curiously for a few seconds until Leo controlled his gagging. A few dozen meters farther on he saw the pit and the tangle of limbs sticking out of the dirt and lime. About a hundred meters after an earthmover was pushing more dirt over the bodies, its engine a faint, steady drone.

"We identify as many as we can," the girl volunteered. "But it's hard to know when all you have is an arm or a leg. There aren't enough of us and the fleet has more urgent duties than collating death lists."

"Fleet...?"

"Admiral Hanford's 34th Task Force. They arrived five months ago. Without them we'd be blowing up intruder transports, sabotaging power plants, throwing rocks at them."

"Ah. How many others have, uh...come back?"

"A couple of hundred. All in the last week, it seems. Why'd they let you go?"

Leo shook his head, staring at the mass grave. "I don't know. One moment I was there, the next..."

"That's all right. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. It's been bad for all of us."

SHE TOOK HIM TO THE CIVIC CENTER AND LEFT HIM IN THE CARE OF A heavyset man named Cal. He presided in the shade of a grimy awning over a huge desk outside the amphitheater. Faint breezes licked at the papers stacked before him. He smiled thinly at Leo and tapped on the keypad of his terminal. "Geroncero...Geroncero..." He shook his head. "So many records were destroyed."

"The outpost found me in their computer."

"Not everything is centralized anymore."

Leo licked his lips. "How many days did it take the intruders to seize the city?"

"One. The first day it was over." Cal shrugged. "No surprise, we weren't prepared for an invasion. Who was going to invade us?" He sighed. "Any relatives, Your Honor?"

"Why does everyone call me that?"

"Your Honor? Does it bother you? Maybe it should. You are returned to us. We thought you were all dead. Some said your spirits wandered the forests. Wishful thinking, that. But you've come back. Might as well have risen from the dead. That calls for some respect, eh? The honored dead, home from the grave." He grunted a laugh. "Relatives?"

"My wife, Sarah."

"Sarah Geroncero..." Cal's face brightened suddenly. "Damn! Yes!" He laughed. "Go on inside, Your Honor. I know her."

"Personally? Sarah?"

"She was in my company the first year, yes."

Leo smiled for the first time since his return. "How is she?"

"Alive. I wouldn't be too particular otherwise. My wife died the first day. So did my daughter."

"Oh...I'm sorry..."

Cal waved a big hand. "You didn't know. You had your own horrors to worry about." Leo frowned.

"Now," Cal continued, "go on through there," he pointed at the wide entry to the amphitheater. "The provost will give you new clothes and take you to where the others are waiting. I'll try to contact your wife."

Leo walked through the archway. A few partisans, dressed like his escort, stood talking quietly with a pair of Armada regulars in dark gray. Further down the corridor a work crew was busily rebuilding a wall. He entered a long room lined with benches. A desk stood at the far end. The woman behind it looked up.

"Cal sent me," Leo said. "I'm a—"

"A Returned, yes." She made a note in a book, then came around the desk. She took something from a locker nearby and brought it to him. "Give me those robes; you can wear these." She shook her head. "Inconspicuous bastards; couldn't even give any of you decent clothing to send you back in."

Leo slipped the robe from his shoulders and accepted the plain white utilities. The provost studied his body, frowning.

"Something wrong?" Leo asked.

She blinked and shrugged, then took the robe back to the locker. "Go on through," she said. "The others are there, those who haven't been placed yet. Wait there and someone will process you through."

Leo zipped the suit up. The fabric was stiff, as if brand new. Maybe it was. He left the room and stepped into the main amphitheater.

Canvases hid whole sections of seats from stage to outer rim. Not all of the damage had been covered up, but rubble had been moved off the stage, and from most of the floor. Four big dispensers occupied the stage, and people in white utilities crowded around them.

The dispensers gave out water, nutribars, anaphages, and news sheets. As he neared them he studied the faces around. He recognized no one. He drew a tall cup of water and went to the news sheets.

"Armada Task Force in Pursuit of Intruder Fleet," the headline read. Leo pulled off a copy. The text went on to describe the elements contained in the task force, the names of the ships and their commanders, but said nothing about where this action took place or what elements of the intruders had been encountered, engaged, or even seen.

"Lot of crap."

Leo looked up sharply. A young man leaned against the dispenser drinking from a cup and staring at the news sheet in Leo's hand.

"Excuse me?" Leo said.

"I said that's a lot of crap. Armada's not following anything. They're sitting out on the perimeter of the system waiting for something they aren't sure they can handle. They aren't likely to tell us what's really happening."

"And what is really happening?"

The young man frowned at Leo. "Are you making fun of me?"

"No, I—"

The young man straightened.

"Leo...?"

Tingling spread over his scalp, down his neck. He turned and the chilly sensation changed to warmth when he saw Sarah. For a moment it seemed everything had fixed in place; nothing moved, no sound intruded. Then Leo reached for her, the cup flying from his hand.

Her fingers pressed against him, the nails digging through the fabric of his clothes, her mouth against his neck, her hair in his face. They made sounds together somewhere between laughter and sobs that tried to embody everything they felt.

The eyes were what he had missed, he realized then. Sarah's eyes were small and intense, deep mahogany. She pushed away from him and glared over his shoulder at the young man.

"You have a problem, agitator?" she asked quietly.

Leo turned and saw the young man smile sardonically, shake his head, and wander off. Puzzled, Leo looked questioningly at Sarah.

She was thinner, the lines in her long face deeper. Leo grasped her hands; they felt odd. He looked at her left hand and saw two fingers



missing. Sarah balled the hand into a fist and smiled self-consciously, then pulled him into another hug.

"I never expected to see you again," she hissed into his ear. "I thought everything was gone. Over. I thought—"

"Yes," he said, because it was the only thing he could think to say then, "yes, yes, it's me, yes."

**S**HE HAD HER OWN CABIN, A PREFAB SET OF cubicles on the outskirts of the city, south of the refugee camp. Once there she set the pace of their lovemaking and Leo, unsure of himself, let her undress him and tumble him into her bed. Till night fell their conversation was conducted by touch and smell and taste and small articulations of breath.

She was sinewy, strong, and Leo found scars on her body that made him wince. Sarah did not give him a chance to ask. Time for that later. She absorbed all his attention now in reunion. All that mattered was the connection reestablished, the half-remembered topography reexplored.

Her ferocity startled him. She did not cling to him so much as held him in place. Her fingers pressed into him and her mouth tasted his flavor. If this were a last night Leo could not imagine it any differently, and the thought made him cry. She stopped her frantic motion and touched his cheek. Leo watched her stare at her fingertips for several seconds. Then her face stretched, eyes becoming slits, and her own tears came. She traced the lines of his face and shook her head.

"You're home," she whispered. "Never again..."

She brought her forehead down onto his chest. Leo held her, riding with her tight sobs. They lay together like this till they slept. Sometime before dawn they awoke and made love again. Leo fell asleep after that, and when he woke up in the full morning light, Sarah was gone.

THE NOTE ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER READ, "MY SHIFT ENDS AT 1300, I'll be home then. Love, Sar." Leo relaxed as he read it.

The domicile had a narrow shower stall that sprayed him weakly with tepid water. The hard bar of soap smelled of institutions. As Leo stepped out, toweling himself, he stopped. Across from him a full-length mirror bolted to the wall gave back his reflection.

Leo had not seen himself like this in three years. He was trim, but without a single hard line. His skin was a healthy bronze color, smooth and scarless. What struck him most was his face. He was young, young in a way lost to everyone he had seen since his return. He wore no deep etchings of hatred or constant fear or hunger.

A banging from the other room broke his attention. He pulled on his utilities and went to the door. Two Armada officers waited outside.

"Co Geroncero?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Commander Sandower, Armada Security. This is Lieutenant Tamos. May we speak with you?"

Leo felt inclined to refuse, but he did not know if he could. He had not seen a uniform in over three years and it bothered him now to realize just how persuasive they could be. He wished Sarah were home. There were so many things—like rules—that he needed to relearn.

When the two officers failed to recognize his dilemma and beg to come back later, Leo nodded and opened the door. Across the way an older man sat before his domicile cleaning a rifle. He glanced at Leo but made no sign of acknowledgment.

"My wife isn't home," he said lamely.

"That's all right, Your Honor. We wanted to speak with you."

"Uh—OK. But please—no more 'Your Honor.' It makes me uncomfortable."

"As you wish." Lieutenant Tamos sat down in one of the three camp chairs and opened a small case on his lap.

"If you wouldn't mind, Co Geroncero," Sandower said, "we'd like you to tell us everything that happened."

Leo folded his arms. "Everything about what?"

"Your capture, your imprisonment, and your return."

"Oh," Leo looked at the device on Tamos' lap. "You're recording this?"

"Yes."

"Well...there's not much to tell...could I get you anything to drink or something?"

"No, thank you. We're fine. Please, sit down, Co Geroncero."

"Uh, look, could this wait—"

"No."

Leo started and stared at Commander Sandower.

"We need to have a statement, Co Geroncero, and we need it as soon as possible. It was highly irregular for you to leave the processing center before being officially released. This should all have been taken care of last night. So, if you please..."

"All right," Leo said. He went to the kitchen and drew a cup of water, then sat down opposite Lieutenant Tamos. He took a drink, tried to remember the beginning, and began talking.

"ONE MOMENT WE WERE TRYING TO GET OUT OF THE CITY, INTO THE forests, the next I was elsewhere. One moment I was trying to come to terms with the destruction of my home, the next I was trying to understand how I had gotten to a lovely valley with a bunch of strangers. One moment I was frightened for my wife's life, the next I was frightened that I would never see her again. Everyone else seemed to be having the same problems. People wandered from person to person, searching for someone they knew, or sat down on the grass and gave in to shock, terror, hysterics. It became clear that my world hadn't been the only one struck by the intruders. And somehow we'd all been tossed together knowing no one. We were all strangers. Not that unlikely, I suppose, there are—were—a couple dozen towns. And we were all naked. Nothing had been brought with us. Some remembered seeing a light, others remembered smoke, but most of us remembered only trying to run and suddenly being here, in this place."

"I sat down and stared at the sky—almost a familiar shade of blue, but not quite—and I watched the sunset and I tried to recognize constellations. But frankly I've never been particularly good at that to begin with. I'm a child of the city, with its bright lights and haze that filters out all but the brightest stars. I can manage constellations then, but out in the countryside where all the stars are visible I can't find even the most familiar. That was one of the things I found so wonderful about coming out to a new colony. So many stars...and it didn't matter, because none of the constellations were familiar anyway after so far a journey. But in this valley not even the few arrangements I had managed to construct were visible."

"But there was fresh water running in a stream, most of the trees were fruitbearing, and the climate was pleasant even at night. Some of us tried to scale the wall of the valley, but we never made it. Something always just put us back and we never found out what was on the other side of the wall. It was a prison, no doubt, and many of us behaved like prisoners...at first. There were angry shouts and stomping about, and a few even began bullying others, but none of the rage lasted very long. There was no advantage to be gained and we were too few for groups and cliques to form. There were perhaps fifty people. Two men tried to assert themselves as our leaders, but there was nothing for them to use to coerce us except their own brutishness. One day they were gangued up on and beaten up and that was the end of it. And we never saw our jailers."

"Signs of them, sure. Whatever it was that kept returning people to the valley floor when they got near the crest of the valley walls. Our waste products were somehow removed. The trees provided a variety of foodstuffs constantly. The temperature never changed more than a few degrees. And one day a man fell out of a tree and broke his leg. While some were trying to fashion splints out of limbs, he vanished—no one saw him vanish—and returned the next day, healed. He couldn't remember where he'd gone or even that he had gone, but he remembered the fall and the pain. We were being taken care of. But we never saw the intruders themselves."

"Eventually, all protest died. We settled down. People paired off or formed other liaisons. Even that seemed to carry no risk. We talked about the invasion, the people we'd left behind, talked about various

ways of resisting. There wasn't anything to resist, though. After several months we just...lived. We formed simple partitions out of branches and leaves, organized ourselves to play games, and talked. Talked about a mass assault on the next valley—if there was one—or perhaps a hunger strike—one of us tried that, and after a couple of weeks, she vanished and reappeared fed and healthy. Somewhere during the second year all such ideas became little more than occasional banter.

"Still, there was considerable bitterness. Open weeping was common among us. We fell into the habit of forming circles at night and remembering our homes and our families. It was important to not forget. We accepted, often we were happy, but we never forgot.

"Then one day people started disappearing. It was startling. You could be talking to someone and they'd simply vanish in mid-sentence. There was a panic. All of us, I'm sure, believed that now we were going to the real prison, that this had all been some crazy experiment to study us and it was over and now came the torture and hardship. People rushed around hugging each other, saying last things. See, this time we were more prepared. It didn't happen fast and we could tie up loose ends with each other, something none of us had been able to do at the invasion. Over the course of several hours, we all...left. When I was returned I left about six people. We'd all huddled together, our backs to each other so that we could feel we were together but we wouldn't see each other vanish.

"Then I was in the forest, cold and scared, and I didn't know where I was. The partisans who found me scared me because I thought for a moment they were intruders. It took a while before I really accepted that I was home."

**T**HE LIEUTENANT SWITCHED OFF HIS device. Commander Sandower frowned. "You never once saw the enemy?" he asked.

Leo shook his head. Lieutenant Tamos closed his case and walked outside.

"Go Geroncleros, I'll have to request that you tell no one else what you've told me."

"Other than my wife, I don't really intend to tell anyone."

"Not even her. No one."

Leo blinked. "I don't understand."

"Please, Go Geroncleros. We're in a difficult situation and learning how to handle it as we go. We're in a war and there are factors we need to control. Rumors are one of the things we need to control. I'm sure you can understand that things said innocently in one context can become quite something else as they spread. We need to minimize the information flux until we have a handle on who we're fighting and how to fight them. We'd appreciate your cooperation."

"But—"

"If we can't rely on your cooperation in this, we'll have to take you into custody."

Leo nodded mutely, still incomprehending, a chill dancing over his scalp. Commander Sandower smiled tightly, shook his hand, and left.

From outside came a stream of sounds—people talking, hammers driving nails, children playing, small machines humming—a background burble of human activity that felt alien to Leo. He relished these sounds, explored them while he stood transfixed in the center of the small space that served as a living room in the prefab domicile. Everything seemed new, yet familiar, in the way a powerful *déjà vu* insists on the familiarity of something never done, never seen, never felt.

I'm not even supposed to talk about why I feel this way? Leo wondered.

A child screamed and Leo felt his muscles tense before he recognized that it was a scream of fun, part of a game, qualitatively different from a scream of fear or pain. There was too much to get used to again.

prepare dinner. He stared at the cookers and packages of dried food and scratched his head. Finally he went for help.

The weapon cleaner was gone. Leo went to the next hut and knocked. An old man hobbled up to the screen and squinted at Leo.

"Excuse me, I don't mean to intrude—"

The old man shook his head and turned away. Leo watched him walk back into the shadows of his hut. After a few seconds, Leo groaned and moved to the next one.

A woman appeared at the door. Gray streaked her dark hair and her eyes were glossy hard, made angrier by the harsh line pressed between her eyebrows. "Yes?"

"Excuse me for troubling you, but I—" he laughed self-consciously. "—I need some help. Could you show me how to operate the kitchen equipment? I want to make dinner for my wife, but—"

"You're a Returned?"

"Uh, yes. I'm Leo Geroncleros."

The eyebrows shifted, seemed to relax. "Sar's husband." She nodded slowly. "Let me get some things. I'll be right over."

"Thank you."

He stepped away from her door and turned. He glimpsed a pair of children ducking out of sight down an aisle. He walked back, watching down that aisle to see where they had gone, warmly curious.

He came against something hard in the middle of his chest. Leo looked around, startled. Polarized goggles glinted above sun-browned cheeks; dun-colored utilities covered lanky bodies that crowded around him.

"Excuse me—"

A fist snapped his head around. Black pinpoints danced in his vision. Then the blows came too fast to count. Leo dropped to his knees.

"Collaborator! Traitor!"

Leo tried to cover his head. He curled up as tightly as he could. They kicked him and beat his back and shoulders. The air cracked overhead, a thunderclap that set his ears ringing. A second one, and suddenly the beatings stopped.

"Names!" someone shouted. "Names and numbers! Stop!"

A third blast. Leo looked up and saw them running, diving aside down aisles between huts.

He let out a shaky breath. His chin was wet and he wiped at it absently. His nose felt numb and warm. When he looked at his hand it was red.

"Your Honor! Oh, my—"

People gathered around, this time trying to help. As he let himself be straightened to his feet, all the pains came to the surface. Leo winced at each small movement. Someone got under his right arm and he leaned against the support. He looked about at the faces full of worry and concern, and all he felt was bafflement.

Then he saw the old man in the hut he had first approached standing before his door, glaring at Leo with an expression that stunned him. Leo could not recall ever before seeing such vivid hatred. He gave the old man a questioning, puzzled look. The old man turned away and went inside.

He tried to smile reassuringly at Sarah while the med tech worked on him.

"Lot of bruises, Your Honor," the tech said. "Couple of cracked ribs and your nose is broken, but other than that, you're just going to be uncomfortable for a week or two."

"Hm. Nothing new."

The tech looked interested. "Oh?"

"I've been uncomfortable since I've been back."

"Oh." The tech checked his monitor again. "I see no old scarring. What did they use, direct nerve induction?"

"For what?"

"Torture."

"I—"

"Is he done?" Sarah broke in. "Can I take him home now?"

"Hm? Oh, certainly. Just be careful not to do anything strenuous for a few days."

Leo zipped up his utilities and put a hand on Sarah's shoulder.

It was late afternoon already. Leo felt embarrassed about the whole

LEO SPENT THE REST OF THE MORNING TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO

incident. All he had wanted to do was have dinner waiting for her when she came home. Instead he was the center of a silly incident that made no sense and rather than helping Sarah, he was now more of a burden.

"Were any of them caught?" Leo asked.

"No. Frankly, they won't be."

"What?"

"Enough. You're going home to rest."

"But—"

"Enough."

Leo felt silent. They were walking past a long row of tents containing med units and wounded. Most lay nestled amid the machinery, quietly sleeping, their pain siphoned off before it reached their brains. The course of the last three years was encoded in their faces, each line, scar, and shadow a remnant of what had happened to them.

Others were awake. In the sharp, unsoftened light they looked like abstractions, representations of all the pain a human soul can know. Leo looked away.

The old man stood in his doorway, backlit, but Leo could feel his eyes, his resentment. "Who is that?" he asked.

Sarah looked and the old man backed away from his door. "Oh. Co. Weilan."

"He hates me."

"He hates everyone. He had four children, three sons and a daughter. They all died as partisans."

"Mm."

The light was on in the domicile. Sarah frowned, her hand brushed the grip of her sidearm. "Wait," she said quietly and left him standing in the middle of the avenue.

Leo watched her step through the door. For a few seconds he was alone in the street. Only a few seconds, no time at all. His heart rate accelerated; he peered into shadows between huts, jerked sharply—painfully—at a loud crack from somewhere behind him; turned his head left and right in mounting panic he knew was silly. He did not wait. He latched, ribs complaining, toward the domicile.

He pulled open the door and stopped at the threshold.

"Come in, Your Honor."

Sarah glared at him, her lips pulled under so her mouth was just a line. She stood in the center of the small front room. A man Leo did not recognize sat before her, smiling pleasantly at Leo. A man Leo did recognize stood beside him, watching Leo, a barely suppressed chuckle shaping his face in a lopsided grin.

"Leo..." Sarah said quietly, tightly.

"We're been discussing you, Your Honor," the man seated said. "I think it is rude to talk about someone when they aren't present."

Sarah shot him a look. "It doesn't stop you."

"Rudeness is useful. Come in, Your Honor. Sit. I'm sorry to hear what happened to you."

Leo immediately believed that this man could easily have prevented the beating. He glanced at the other man, the one Sarah had labeled "Agitator" from the refugee center.

"It's rude to enter someone's home uninvited," Leo said.

"Hm. Tell that to the Armada."

"It's not the Armada sitting in my chair."

"But it was earlier."

"They were invited."

"Technicality. Your Honor. You couldn't have refused. You knew that, too, so let's not play with semantics."

"All right," Leo sighed, winced at a stab of pain, and moved to an empty chair. "What do you want?"

"Don't you want to know who I am?"

"I know who you are. Not your name, just your kind. So what do you want?"

"I see your stay with the Intruders didn't dull your intellect."

"I didn't—" He hesitated, remembering Commander Sandower. "What do you want?"

"I want you to bear witness, Your Honor."

"Don't call me that. Witness to what?"

"Injustices...those you suffered from the Intruders and those

you've suffered from the Armada."

"I'm not sure what injustices you're talking about. The Armada? What have they done?"

The man leaned forward suddenly, eyes large and bright. His intensity startled Leo. "They're here. That's enough for a lot of us. For others, there has to be more. Bear witness."

"The Armada's on our side. They're here to help."

"Indeed? Well, maybe. But we couldn't have refused." He stood, crossed the small space, and leaned over Leo, hands resting on the arms of Leo's chair. Sweat beaded delicately on his upper lip, across the lines on his brow. "We're not convinced that the Intruders were alien at all."

"What?" Leo tried to look away, but the man's presence drew him. His breath was faintly sour and his clothes gave a mildly acid odor. "That's absurd."

"Is it? Did you ever see an intruder?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Then how do you know it wasn't the Armada?" He shook the chair. "How do you know?"

He turned away and Leo felt instantly relieved. He glanced at Sarah and saw anxiety, anger, her body tight with checked momentum.

"Why would the Armada—even if they could, why would they?"

"They're here. That's enough. Do you think they'll ever leave?"

Leo felt drawn to argue, but he did not. The man moved with a looseness that should have been easy, casual, the kind of relaxed indifference born of confidence, except that it lacked any sureness and ease. Everything about him seemed anchored to a tightwound knot somewhere in the middle of his back, pulling him into a slightly hunched, gungy posture that could not rest. He prowled the small space.

"Think about it, Your Honor," he said finally. "Bear witness. You owe it to your world, to your neighbors. To Sarah." He smiled briefly. "Good night."

"My god," Leo breathed when the two men had gone. "Who was that?"

"Migron and his pet asshole, Carber," Sarah said bitterly. She left the living room and a moment later Leo heard water splashing in the sink. When she returned she wore only her undershirt. Her face shone from water and her hair was wet. She wiped under her arms with a damp rag. "He fancies himself the leader of the true partisan movement."

"Is he?"

Sarah shook her head, her expression troubled. "An awful lot of people think he makes sense."

"Do you?"

"No." She looked at him narrowly. "You never saw one?"

"What?"

"An intruder."

"Never."

"Then..." She shrugged, turned, and tossed the rag back toward the sink. "Come on. You need to get into bed."

"Sarah—"

"No argument. You need sleep."

She helped him off with his clothes and eased him into bed. She tucked him in and kissed him.

"I have things to do," she said. "I'll be in later."

He nodded silently and listened to her go out of the room. For a long time he strained to hear her small movements and tried to imagine what they meant, what action went with each sound. Finally, though, weary and sore, he drifted off to sleep, distantly bitter that on his second night home he slept alone.

HE AWOKE TO SHOUTING.

"Not Not No more! Please leave!"

Leo moved too fast and triggered a series of stabbing pains all over his body. He sat on the edge of the bed for a few seconds, eyes squeezed shut, till he willed the aches back to manageable levels. Then he eased to his feet and stepped into the next room.

Sarah, hands on hips, faced a man in civilian clothes. They both looked around when Leo entered.

"Leo—" Sarah started.

The man stepped toward him. "Co Geroncleros, my name is Gavin Taylor; I'm with the Arcs-Epsilon NewsNet. Please give me a few—"

Sarah deftly grabbed his wrist and twisted his arm back and up. Taylor winced.

"No, I said!"

"Sar!" Leo cried, dismayed.

She shot him a look over Taylor's shoulder. "There's been enough trouble already. I won't have anymore."

"Afraid of the truth, Sergeant?" Taylor hissed through clenched teeth.

"No," Sarah began walking him to the door.

"Sarah, let him go!"

She reached the door. "Open it if you please, Co Taylor."

Leo hunched toward them and fell against the door.

"Leo, get out of the way!" Sarah snapped.

"Please, Co Geroncleros—"

"Sarah, please. Let go of him."

"You want another visit from Armada security? Maybe next time they just arrest us both and be done with it."

She pushed Taylor out the door. The journalist caught his balance and turned. He seemed about to say more, then looked around. Up and down the way, people stood outside their domiciles, watching. Several were armed. Leo noticed Co Weilan watching from behind his screen door. Taylor straightened and sighed loudly, then moved off down the street.

"Sar..."

"Three years. We're winning. It took three years but we're winning." She turned and looked at him. Her eyes were bloodshot, moist. "Three years, Leo. I can't—I won't—have anything interfere now."

"Interfere with what?"

She closed her eyes and shook her head quickly. "Don't. Just forget Gavin Taylor."

"But—"

"No!" She stepped close to him. "Three years. We have our home back. It's ours again and we're not going to let anyone take it away from us or change it ever again. We're going to put it back together and keep it that way."

"And what harm does a Co Taylor do?"

"Anything he publishes just reminds us all that the Armada wasn't here to stop the destruction. We were alone to face this and it was terrible, Leo!" Her mouth flexed angrily; her eyes were bright. "We don't know what happened to you. Maybe we don't want to know. It would only remind us that we were helpless and that we may still be helpless. And yes, that hurts."

Leo swallowed and let out his breath slowly. The passion in Sarah's eyes, the way she stood with her hand raised toward him—hand turned up, open, in a gesture that could either offer or ask, but that could easily become a blow—demanded a measured response. Leo was confused, angry, and a little frightened.

"What did he want?" He asked finally.

"I—to ask questions. His just being here could bring Sandower back."

"Who are you more afraid of, Sar? The Intruders or Sandower?"

"What's the difference? For now, Sandower. He's here."

Leo went back to the bedroom and dressed.

"Where are you going?" Sarah asked.

"To see Sandower."

She blocked the door. "Why?"

Leo tried to move her aside. His ribs stabbed sharply. "This has to stop, Sar. Visits from people like Migron, feeling threatened by people like Taylor. It has to stop."

"So what do you think you can do? What do you think Sandower can do? Arrest Migron? Arrest Taylor? Make it all go away and be like it was?"

"Isn't that what you want?"

She nodded. "But I can't have it. And neither can you."

"But they're tearing us apart," Leo wondered for a moment who he meant.

"We're already torn apart. We have to be very careful not to let the rip get any bigger. They're all enemies, Leo. The Intruders, Sandower,

and Gavin Taylor."

"Now you sound like Migron."

Sarah's eyes were wide, strained, as if she were trying to impress her meaning on him with more—much more—than language. Her entire body leaned toward him and seemed to radiate the force of her meaning. It was difficult to recognize this, more difficult to ignore it.

"Let me go with you," she said.

**S**HE HELD HIS HAND TIGHTLY ALL THE WAY to Armada HQ. Leo began counting the people he saw sitting or standing outside their domiciles, clustered in small groups talking, wandering with thumbs hooked in belts or hands shoved in pockets, idle, and gave up at two hundred and fifty.

The three big troop landers that comprised Armada headquarters huddled side by side next to the wrecked amphitheater. A broad field extended all around them, part of it occupied by ground transport, the rest simply providing a field of fire. The tent city began at the edge of the perimeter and flowed along the contours of ruined Panthea.

They were cleared through the gate quickly. Sarah released his hand as they went directly to the broad ramp leading up to the gaping entrance to Armada HQ. Leo spotted the weapon projectors mounted all along the body of the lander. He shivered inwardly. For an instant he thought he had made a mistake coming here. But they walked up the ramp; there was no way to back out now.

Leo felt like he was entering a prison. The light changed as they stepped through the portal; the temperature of the air was cooler; sounds echoed strangely. The clean, efficient lines of the corridors made him anxious; it had been a long time since he had been within anything like this, near machinery that was not broken. By the time they reached Commander Sandower's office, Leo began to doubt the reality of the last three years. He remembered little specific detail. It seemed insubstantial compared to this massive technical presence.

Sandower came around from his desk to greet them.

"Co Geroncleros, welcome. Please, have a seat. This is your wife?"

"Sergeant Geroncleros," Sarah said.

"Of course," Sandower said and sat on the edge of his desk. "How may I help you?"

"Commander..." Leo began, then paused. He looked from Sarah to Sandower and tried to imagine the best words for both of them.

"This situation...I'm very uneasy about it."

"What situation is that, Your Honor?"

"The...occupation."

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean by that."

"Please, Commander. We're in your place now, behind your walls. You do know what I mean. Whether intended or not, the Armada has occupied my home. The way people are acting..."

"Do you have something specific to report? Something you want me to act on?"

"I want...I would like you to leave."

Sandower smiled as if suppressing a laugh. "Co Geroncleros, your experiences among the Intruders notwithstanding, don't you think we understand what is necessary to pursue this war?"

"I'm not sure...my experiences didn't exactly leave me with the impression—"

"Your Honor, may I show you something?"

"Uh...yes, of course."

Sandower leaned backward across the desk and stabbed a couple of buttons. A large wall screen winked on to Leo's left and the cabin lights dimmed.

A woman appeared on the screen and Leo started.

"Do you know her, Your Honor?" Sandower asked.

"Yes, I do. Her name is Kriva, we were together...wherever we were..."

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Someone not visible on the screen asked, "Please, Co, would you describe your treatment from the Intruders?"

Kriva—she was a small woman, copper-skinned, with wide-set dark eyes—seemed uncertain.

"Co?"

"Yes," she answered finally, in a small voice. "It was...unpleasant. I was given a cubicle with a fold down cot. The light was too bright, but it only went out according to some schedule I never got used to. Cold, too."

"What about sanitary facilities?"

"None. It was—I used the floor, a corner. Sometime during the night cycle it was cleaned up, but I never saw that happen. The food came once every—I don't know, it was longer than a day, and I was so hungry...."

Leo found Sarah's hand and squeezed, tighter and tighter as he listened to Kriva describe her stay. Her small body trembled as she spoke, her voice maintaining in a steady drone that became more and more lifeless as the things she described became uglier and uglier. Once Leo heard someone else draw a sharp breath and he looked around. Sarah sat rigidly next to him and he realized how hard he gripped her hand. He released her, but she laid her hand over his and kept it there.

Finally Kriva stood and pulled up her shift to reveal a complex pattern of scars from her ribs down to her hips, all the way around, like a barked tree.

The screen blanked, the lights brightened.

"You say you two were together, Your Honor?" Sandower asked.

Leo nodded.

"Then why are your experiences so at odds?"

"That's not what happened. She—we—that's not the truth."

"Why would she lie?"

Leo looked up at Sandower. The soldier did not look away. He waited patiently for an answer that Leo did not have.

"I think perhaps you'd better stay with us, Co Geroncero."

"He'll be all right home with me," Sarah said at once.

"I don't think so, Sergeant."

Sarah began shouting at Sandower, but Leo heard none of it. He fixed his gaze on the screen and his ears filled with a dense, liquid howl. He felt warm and he thought, that's not what happened, over and over and over.

**T**HE MARINES DROPPED HIM OFF AT Sarah's domicile. He stood in the street and watched the transport move off in a trail of dust until the door slapped open and Sarah grabbed his arms.

"Leo?" she hissed.

He looked at her face and wondered for a moment why she seemed so gaunt and tired. Then he felt it in himself, a deep weariness that enveloped him from within the longer he stood staring at her. He closed his eyes and almost pitched forward, but Sarah caught him against her shoulder, got under his arm, and walked him into the domicile.

"Sorry," he said.

"It's all right. They let you go, you're free now. You're home."

He laughed dryly.

"You're burning up, Leo," he heard her say as she helped him stretch out on the bed. He felt a compress laid on his forehead, a sheet drawn over him, but he was already far gone in fevered sleep.

His dreams flowed swiftly, cobbled-together images of small rooms and forests, electric shocks and clear flowing water. Sandower with azure skin and Sarah with a hook hand. The visions careened through his mind, clattered and moiled in the greasy depths of his torment. His skin felt cool and he reached for a cover.

"My god, what did they do to?" someone asked. The voice was familiar and unwelcome.

"Leave him alone," another said—Sarah?—and the cover returned.

But the voices intruded persistently. Leo opened his eyes; the room was dark. He sat up, his feet touching the cool plastic floor. His heart slammed hard, panicked at the thought that he was still in the small cubicle with the fold-down cot and the harsh light and foul dark. He raised his arms to shield his face.

"No," he pleaded in a whisper.

"Leo?"

"Sarah?"

"Tim here, Leo."

He lowered his arms. She knelt before him, offering her hands. He laid his own within them and stared at her.

"You need to get him out of here," another voice said.

Leo looked up. Migron stood in the doorway.

"We can't move him yet," Sarah said, her voice thick with anger. "Look at him—he's..."

"Damaged," Migron said. "Yes, obviously. Just as obviously the Armada expects us to do nothing with him for that reason."

"I can't anyway," Sarah said. "I'm under house arrest, remember?"

Migron laughed. "And look who they have guarding you. People from your own cadre."

"They're looking for me to run with Leo! Can't you see that?"

"Go where?" Leo asked.

Sarah looked surprised. Migron stepped into the room.

"Away from Planthea," he said. "The hills. Partisans still control the countryside, the Armada hasn't convinced them to come in yet."

"Why?"

"We don't trust the Armada—"

"Tell him the truth!" Sarah snapped.

After a long silence, Migron said, "We don't think the Intruders have gone. Scouts have seen things in the forests, movements, shapes."

"Machines?" Leo asked.

"No, nothing so clear, but—"

"But you think it's Armada."

"No. Yes. Maybe it is, maybe the Armada is only lying about driving the Intruders out."

"Or the Armada has been the intruder all along, as you say."

"I don't believe that," Sarah hissed.

"Why go?" Leo asked.

"Why—to fight for your home," Migron said.

Leo closed his eyes. "I have no home. Leave me alone."

He rolled back onto the bed, away from Sarah, away from Migron, and pulled his legs up against the ache in his body.

"What the hell do you mean?"

Suddenly Leo felt himself pulled from the bed. Sarah cursed and, as Leo turned toward Migron, she kicked out. Migron side-stepped it and swung Leo around. The blow impacted Leo's thigh. Migron jammed Leo against the wall; the domicile shook.

"What do you mean you have no home! What does that mean, Your Honor?"

Leo looked at the face pressed close to him. There was something about it that appealed to Leo, the way it was drawn and contorted by a rage that centered in the eyes, which now were vivid, clear lenses.

Then Sarah punched Migron—somewhere, Leo did not see—and the wind gushed from Migron's mouth, a hot burst of faintly sour air into Leo's face. She grabbed a wrist and pulled it down and around behind Migron and abruptly he was across the room, on the floor. Sarah stood between them, facing Migron, arms akimbo.

Migron rubbed the small of his back and struggled to his feet.

"I want an answer," he said. "What do you mean you have no home?"

"Does this happen in your home?" Leo asked. "Does a stranger bully you in your home?" He sat down on the edge of the bed. "A thief has taken it away. I thought, when I came back, I could be at home again. But you can't. It's been violated and you know it and it never feels safe again." He shook his head. His chest jerked, as if from a hiccup. "I have no home." He stretched out on the bed, face to the wall.

THE SHORT WINTER CAME WITH COLD WINDS AND IRON GRAY SKIES. THE days became studies in routine. Leo sought familiarity and when he

*Continued on page 93*

# HOW FAR TO THE END OF THE WORLD?

BY GREGORY FEELEY

Archimedes Zin was responsible for getting the space ark *Centaur* safely to Neptune—but the Wild Boys had other ideas.

AS HE TURNED INTO the corridor, Arch encountered a Wild Boy gliding toward him, face contorted into the stylized frown of a *dakini*. Uncertain whether to nod or frown in censure, Arch averted his gaze, his own features impassive. The Boy, his expression unreadable behind the lurid swirls around his eyes, pushed past without acknowledgement. In the dimmer light of another corridor, the encounter would

have seemed an intrusion of the supernatural.

The sight of the Boy's face gave Arch a shock, which registered only a second after he had passed. Then Arch remembered that the Council had banned the newskin masks as soon as they had appeared, prompting the Wild Boys to take up tattoos. Arch shuddered at the thought of colored dyes injected beneath the skin using home methods.

As he tapped open the hatch leading to the lab level, Arch began relating mentally the incident to Basho, a habit he had fallen into during the year since his death. *Perhaps the Council should have banned the tattoos, sent the kids in to have their dermas flushed.* He remembered then that this had been proposed, and some of the Boys had warningly dashed their faces with oxides. The upshot of this he could not recall, but Basho's response was clear enough: "Perhaps the Council should examine the underlying causes of this unrest rather than insisting on quenching its manifestations."

You always were a liberal, Arch thought, as he sealed the hatch above him. The seals were intended to protect the ship against explosive decompression in an outer chamber, but one of the proctors had advised the researchers to restrict entry to authorized personnel. By now Arch touched his thumb to the panel automatically enough to have forgotten the reason for it, but he paused at the thought. Did they worry that thieves would enter in search of pigments to paint themselves or emulsion for more masks?

In fact the engineers' labs had little equipment that anyone could pilfer. Recessed panels and blank screens greeted the visitor, and even Arch's seat collapsed into the floor when he was not using it. A scale model rotated in the air just below the ceiling: a replica of the *Centaur*, half a meter long, turning on a transparent spindle too thin to see. Models of the ship, mostly holograms, could be found in any classroom, but Arch had built this one from a clear colloid that darkened when stressed. The model, although unhelpful as a guide to the atria and vesicles lacing the ship's interior, illustrated perfectly the stresses the *Centaur's* natural and rebuilt reaches sustained in spinning its life pods about.

When students visited the labs, Arch brought the model down and explained it, then increased its spin and let them see the darker striations form near the open spaces, like a shadow on the hung. If any of his colleagues saw self-laceration in this demon-

stration, they never mentioned it. The students watched the deepening shades as the arms' blur increased, variously interested or baffled. Arch would usually apologize for the room's sparseness and explain that a proper alchemist's laboratory would have been full of retorts and bubbling cauldrons, stench and eye-stinging smoke. "Alchemy?" the students would ask.

"Up seat," he said absently, and it flopped out with a familiar rustle, snapping rigid and inflating in seconds.

Arch sat and pulled the controls toward him as he spoke the words to bring status reports and news before his eyes. The canker in the heart, the gash in Arch's dream that he knew he would spend the rest of his life seeking to repair, lay just beneath this level of data; but Arch paused at its surface, like a waterbug poised on a pond, and read through the morning's summary of ship news.

An election, a reported sighting of a new ice eruption on Triton, and the marriage of a prominent woman flowed past, but what caught Arch's eye was a story from Castor, where an elderly mom had been threatened by a Wild Boy with his fist. The headline reported only that the perpetrator was not yet identified, implying that apprehension was imminent. The real story, Arch supposed, would be available on the nets—which the authorities, however, could discourage to the extent of forbidding their access to work terminals.

Arch found himself recalling the Boy as he pushed on into deeper currents of data. It seemed now that he had looked directly at Arch for a second, the pigmented grimace unsoftened by his set mouth and glaring eye. *Why would he look at me like that?*

"Perhaps he saw in you the architect of his generation's undoing," But Basho would never say that.

Peng came in while Arch was deep within the intersecting fields of some high-order conundrum. Arch waved absently without looking up, oblivious to the young man's whistling. It wasn't until Peng offered him tea that Arch sat back and took notice of him.

"Yes, thank you," he said, banishing the unyielding problem with a gesture. "How are you this morning?"

"My afternoon is fine," Peng answered as he fussed with the pot. "I'm moving forward." Arch was a propulsioneer, a discipline only tangentially related to asteroid architecture. He worked here because the location of his office mattered little and, of course, Arch's lab had the vacant space.

Hot water hissed over the tea, which released a perfume of steeping leaves. He whistled idly, a bridge Arch recognized from an opera of the last century, composed by a solo pilot on a Martian shuttle.

Peng brought over the pot and set it between them, and Arch watched the steam emerge from its classically shaped spout and tumble erratically in the low gravity, as if dazzled by its passage from the twelfth century to the twenty-second. Basho's wife had made the pot ten years ago, repelled by the cylindrical, almost massless flask the lab had used. Arch had hewn a cubic meter of material from some tunnel's end, doubtless weakening the *Centaur's* structure by some indefinable quantum, for Madame to refine into a kind of ceramic. The handle was worn from Basho's fingers.

"How's your work going?" Arch asked. *Étiquette* suggested a younger man inquire first, but Peng knew better than to raise the subject.

"Interesting. We sent a pulse through the system last week and are still studying the results. Strange job, using these trickles to estimate the effects of a thrust half a trillion times greater."

"Indeed." Arch waited as Peng turned to offer tea to the other person in the room, a young technician who had just pulled her headset off. Idly he watched the slow swirl of ground leaves settle against the slope of his cup. His mother, who had been a civil engineer in the Celestial City, believed that the resultant patterns reflected cosmic wave functions from which premonitions could be inferred. A quantum field effect, perhaps? More efficacious beyond the Earth's gravity?

"We'll be running bigger tests over the course of the year," Peng continued as he settled into his seat. "There's already a schedule—" He tapped at his fingerpad, and a display appeared on the screen before him, "though I don't believe it for a minute. Everything will change with the new results. In fact—" He changed the screen and studied it for a second. "I've got to take an inspection tour today, and now is as good

a time as any. Care to come see where they cage the tiger?"

Arch began a gesture of polite refusal. "Thank you, Hung-chang, but I've actually—"

"Oh, nonsense." Peng's enthusiasm often overrode his manners. "It will give you a chance to look upon something momentous. You have been weighing abstractions for hours, and your spirit needs a leaving-ening of *yin*."

Arch smiled. "A wise point, but I truly have work to do." He could not imagine how one would conduct a physical inspection of the propulsion system, which was fitted into the surrounding rock like a screw in wood. Like the ship's other regions, it was easily monitored by thousands of on-site nodes. The era when engineers could venture below to study the great engines from surrounding catwalks was two worlds past.

"But propulsion has everything to do with your work. Don't you want to see what places the stress against your structures?"

Whether Peng was being cruel or merely thoughtless, Arch could not know. Numbly he set aside his cup and stood.

THEY HEADED APT ALONG A NARROW corridor used mostly by technicians and little traveled at this hour. Arch wondered how they would react if they encountered a Wild Boy coming from the other direction. After a minute, uneasy at the silence, he voiced the question.

"I would punch his nose," Peng said decisively. "Louts like that should

be slapped into line."

Arch always marveled at the conservatism of the young. "These are the youths just younger than you," he mused. "You can remember the months before Launch, so our voyage has a purpose to you. These kids know nothing but the *Centaur*, have no reason to understand what we left or value our going. Had we kept the original schedule—"

"Pigs' balls. A peasant in dynastic Kwangsi grew up amid toll and unchanging prospects but didn't demand teleology as a condition for living in society. These students are brats who took advantage of their elders' inattention during the troubles. They should be hauled into place by their scruffs."

"Perhaps their immediate elders failed them," Arch suggested, a bit maliciously.

"Believe me, I had little authority over my younger dorm mates. If I cuffed one for bad manners, a mom might have thrashed me."

It occurred to Arch that the trainee position Peng had assumed three years ago might not today be available to a student that age. The distortions of a society working toward a great event that would only happen once might fall hardest on the young.

"Containment system's in there," Peng said suddenly, gesturing toward the featureless left wall. "The actual vessel is overhead, of course, along the central axis. Most heavily insulated space in the ship, although we still get reaction from the occasional cosmic particle."

"The designers once debated putting the containment vessel outside the ship's hull," Arch murmured. "They thought then that if it was breached, the explosion might not destroy the entire ship."

"Don't count on it," Peng laughed. "You know what that much antimatter would do if detonated at once? Blow any surviving chunk of the *Centaur* off the ecliptic at several hundred Gs. Even a partial reaction would scatter the remaining antimatter in all directions, and some would strike the hull. Bam."

"No doubt they concluded as much," Arch noticed that Peng had not paused for any of the turnoffs. "Where are you taking me?"

"To an air lock, of course. You can't see anything directly from the inside."

Of course. Had Peng shyly supposed that Arch would have balked at an invitation to a spacewalk? He might honestly have assumed that Arch understood what he was proposing. There was no way to learn this.

The air lock was used only for scientific excursions, and its dock-



# He stared, unable to discern scale or distance, before realizing that he was looking at the polished surface of the throat as it sailed past him.

master was a minor node. "Peng Hung-chang and Zin Arch-ai," Peng told it, enunciating carefully.

"Archimedes," Arch corrected. So little computing power was now delegated to such entities that he could imagine it failing to identify him.

"My apologies." Peng was already taking the proffered suit, and he sent a second one spinning toward Arch. Within minutes they were stepping onto the work platform beneath the slowly wheeling stars of the *Centaur's* stern. No centrifugal force urged them gently into space, although Arch knew that a dozen meters' walk away from the axis would bring a noticeable force straining against his magnetized boots. The sun, invisible from the ship's further latitudes, lay almost directly overhead, a bright bead describing a circle tighter than its own radius. They stood silently a moment, alone on the still South Pole of their tiny world.

"Come look at this." Peng pushed himself off the platform and grabbed one of the guy lines that festooned the work area. Pulling himself swiftly hand over hand, he approached the low burnished crater of the thrust nozzle.

At its edge Peng clamped one sole to a metal ribbon lining the rim and looked into the ceramic paraboloid, thirty meters across. Sunlight streamed straight into the throat, which narrowed to darkness only gradually. Arch had the odd sensation of peering into the great ship's sphincter.

"Shall we go down?" Arch didn't expect Peng to wait for a response, and he didn't. The smooth slope afforded no purchase for climbing, so the propulsioneer leaped into space, trailing his safety line behind him. Midway across he fired a quick burst of his gas gun, losing some fraction of mass to the *Centaur* forever. He drifted at once into the nozzle, struck his shoulder and steadied himself. Jauntily he waved to Arch, as though they were now too far apart to speak.

Arch considered grasping Peng's line and rappelling in, then realized that this would merely pull Peng into space. He took out his gas gun, confirmed that it was on its lowest setting, then jumped awkwardly and fired. He coasted in slowly, but landed bent-lined and managed not to stagger.

"Observe." The fluted throat was streaked with Peng's dim shadow, which swung about its edge as he moved, like a pipette stirring a flask.

He flicked on a light, played it about the polished bore. "Four meters in," he said. "Ever been there?"

Without waiting for an answer, Peng stepped into space and fired his gun, which sent him straight into the shaft and out of sight.

Arch looked after him in dismay. If Peng were a younger man, Arch would unhesitatingly interpret his actions as a dare. Was the strapping trying to goad him into youthful behavior? He took out his gun and followed, realizing only as he disappeared into the nozzle's maw that Peng had turned off his torch and lay waiting ahead of him in total darkness.

Arch activated his own torch, which threw an ellipse on a smooth, featureless surface. He stared for a few seconds, unable to discern scale or distance, before realizing that he was looking at the polished surface of the throat as it sailed past him. He glanced behind him and saw a receding disk of stars, the last sight of a child falling down a well.

His orientation established, Arch swung the torch before him and watched the beam slide down the shaft to drop in a larger circle onto a more distant surface: the approaching stomach (the metaphor shifted with each new frame of reference) of the creature that had swallowed him. Peng was not in sight.

Arch got his legs before him in time to avoid crashing into the chamber wall. Rebounding slightly, he played his beam around the cav-

ernous space. Peng was hanging in midair, legs incongruously crossed.

"An interesting paradox: we are at the heart of the ship—precisely upon its rotational axis—yet beyond all human contact. Were we ten kilometers from the hull, sensors would be monitoring us, and we could talk to anyone we wished. Here—" Peng swept his own beam around the bulb-shaped chamber—"no devices at all can be installed, for the drive reaction would burn them away. We are, as one can be nowhere else, invisible."

"Someone could stand outside the nozzle and aim a comm laser at us," Arch ventured.

"Yes, but no one is, and you will notice that I am too far to one side. Push away from the chamber surface before replying, if you don't mind."

Puzzled, Arch complied. "Do you come here often?"

"After each pulse we bring out a walker, which will check the entire surface for evidence of pitting or corrosion. I have it here," he added, patting his belt, "but haven't brought it out yet."

Arch nodded, mystified. After a moment he activated his torch and swept it back around the chamber. Its interior was less than twenty meters across, although Arch knew the thick walls nearly doubled its cross-section. He looked about for the tiny nozzles that would spray plasma into the path of antimatter funneled from the magnetic "tiger cage" that lay aft of the chamber, but they were recessed and shattered. Peng's beam appeared and began sportively to chase Arch's across the eggshell surface until Arch, exasperated, switched his off.

"I'm taking out the walker now," said Peng. The small worklight on his helmet showed him holding a flat box the size of his hand, which he released with a gentle push. The box drifted across the chamber and struck a surface, where it adhered.

"It'll take two days to cover the entire chamber," he remarked. "I'll come back for it then." He looked at Arch, his expression unreadable in the dim light but his stance somehow assessing. "Shall we go?"

Arch had the feeling that something had been expected of him, but could not imagine what. With a puff of vapor Peng drifted into the throat and out of sight.

When Arch caught up with him, Peng was hanging several meters above the work platform, one foot hooked on a guy line. "A beautiful view, Architect, is it not?"

"Indeed." Arch looked curiously at him, but the propulsioneer's gaze was directed outward. At the narrow ends of the *Centaur*, even a modest distance from the ship offered an expanded view of the wheeling stars, and Arch permitted himself a moment's distraction by clipping his towline to the guy and kicking out to the limit of its reach. From this vantage he could turn back and see the ship's lifepods extending from the hull like outriggers, but his attention was caught and held, as always, by the unbroken vista before him.

"How far is't now to th'end o' th' world?" he murmured. He forgot that skinflint mikes picked up everything.

"Why, a day's journey, my master," Peng replied.

Arch turned to stare back at him. "How did you know that?"

"You asked that one a few months ago, and I looked it up." Peng had turned on his inside helmet light, and Arch could see him smiling. "Another poem, at least of a sort. Why is it you elders so prefer verse to novels? I would think a long tale by Ts'ao or Thackeray would have been preferable for whiling away the long hours between worlds."

Arch turned to stare out again. "It doesn't work that way. A novel fills you with sights and sounds you've never known, and you have to call up hundreds of refs to understand it; soon you're engaged in history, not narrative. While a poem hangs in the space before you,

# *My generation, of course, will found a new world, and so shall make tales, not read them. Your verses, elder, will blow to the end of the world...*

bound only tenuously to the contingencies of history. I tried once to read a social novel by a contemporary of Shelley's, and could not; but three hundred years have not separated me from Panthea or the Spirit of Solitude."

"Not three billion kilometers?" Peng was still smiling.

"No, not that."

"And that's why you and Dr. Lee had nicknames for each other."

Arch winced. "Oh, that was more a personal matter. Low-gravity architects have to remind each other that they do have a taste for formal elegance."

"Interesting. My generation, of course, will found a new world, and so shall make tales, not read them. Your verses, elder, will blow to the end of the world, but I doubt they will take root there."

He grabbed the towline, swung himself about, and kicked toward the hatch. Arch pulled himself in after him, pausing as he grasped the rungs to take a last look at the spangled heavens, revolving in slow and perfect silence. From this distance, the Earth was lost in the pinprick glare of the Sun.

"And what verses will bloom on the cold frontier?" he asked himself. Peng, perhaps thinking it a line he could not recognize, did not reply.

"IS NEPTUNE A WORLD?" IT WAS A SUBJECT HE AND BASHO HAD TAKEN up over the years.

"You say no." Basho would always help Arch set out his position, like a neighbor assisting in staking a garden, and then stand beside him and make friendly observations. "It's a cold lump of volatiles, its moons once captured planetesimal and a collection of comets. No life, no change. Its weather all angular momentum."

"It's what Uranus would be were it farther out," said Arch, agreeing cautiously. "It's a lode of resources and merits settlement, but—"

"But Jupiter it can never be." Arch had done his doctoral dissertation in the Greater Jovian, and had spent more than a decade there. Now he waited for Basho, who seemed disconcertingly familiar with Arch's argument, to pounce.

The senior architect settled more comfortably into his chair, as though enjoying the pull of gravity. "Jupiter is enormous, but light—all that hydrogen and helium, with a rocky core that scientists will be centuries getting to. While Neptune has nitrogen, oxygen, iron, and carbon, and a shallower gravity well to haul it from."

"The Greater Jovian has those in the moons," Arch pointed out.

"This is true. I am not belittling the family of Jove; I recall my year on Callisto with fondness. But look now upon Neptune. Seven of its moons remain unvisited; the fine structure of its rings still awaits careful study. Edifices can stand on its surface, as will never be the case for Jupiter or Saturn. Do you feel no flicker of interest?"

"Oh, it's fascinating," said Arch guiltily. "Yes—"

"On Jupiter, transition from gaseous to solid hydrogen takes place at three million atmospheres. Human probes may reach that someday, but not with any foreseeable technology. Neptune, my dear Archimedes, has oceans of liquid water. They too lie beneath crushing pressures, but—" the old man chuckled at his fancy—"those at least may someday be contained."

He leaned forward. "Don't you want to walk upon the surface of a gas giant? Navigate an actual ocean, sink foundations into solid ground? The Galileans are known quantities, their settlement will proceed unperturbed, while Jupiter itself can be explored only by robots. Humanity will spend the next millennium exploring the vast cloud of planetesimals beyond Pluto, and Neptune-Triton, for them, will be civilization."

"Neptune isn't a world, it's a solar system."

ARCH DID NOT RETURN TO HIS WORK BUT SET OUT, ACTING UPON AN obscure impulse he did not examine closely, for the Christian Quarter. The trip took him across the ship's axis, in a pip that flipped over in mid-journey to deliver him feet first but still upright to the Castor side of the *Crestavor*. Like nearly all of the crew members, Arch lived in the pod closer to his workplace and so rarely visited the other side of the ship. The symmetrical design of the outer decks did little to offset his sense of dislocation as he stood waiting in the stranger-filled concourse for an elevator down to Castor.

The three adults he rode down with seemed unexceptionable, but Arch found himself studying them covertly and wondering if any were Christian. It was an unworthy suspicion, he knew, since the Christians looked no different than the rest of the crew. One simply tended to remember those with European features who wore a crucifix pin on their blouses.

More interesting was a sullen-looking boy of perhaps fifteen, who had an unwiped smear of what looked like machine oil under one ear. Arch looked at him severely, but the boy avoided everyone's gaze.

Madame Lee's purse said that she was in her room and willing to receive visitors. Arch had registered his intention to visit, so took the quickest way down after emerging on Castor's top level. The pod's floor plans opened in his mind, familiar as the shape of his desk. He turned down the main corridor, passing the pip booths, and entered the first stairwell.

Two flights down, a turn of the stairs brought Arch into near darkness. Surprised, he looked at the wall light, which had been cracked by a heavy blow and coated with some dark grease. Suddenly frightened, he waited to face the descending steps, which spiraled into deeper shadows.

It had been years since Arch had probed the recesses of the *Crestavor's* foundations himself, but he still kept the tools of his profession about him. His belt torch was no larger than a stylus, but cast a beam down the stairwell as far as its curvature permitted. No one, at least, lay awaiting him on the steps immediately below.

Two levels farther, an intact light cast a faintly diminished glow. Arch saw that it was surrounded by a coarse mesh that had been welded to the bulkhead, evidently to keep away the substances that stained the mesh and streaked the bulkhead underneath. Arch felt a surge of strong emotions: civic indignation, outraged possessiveness. He swung the torch's beam down ahead of him, as though to dispel the gloom of any further violated landings.

In fact, he had continued past his floor. Madame Lee resided in one of the upper levels, where the lighter gravity posed less of a burden to older crewmembers. Arch leaned into the stair's curve, probing with his beam the reaches beyond his sight, then turned and remounted the steps to his proper exit.

The Christian Quarter occupied several levels, from its upper reaches where the elderly crew resided, down to Level Seven where young children lived in full gravity. The Christian community had no official standing, as the ship's Charter made no provision respecting religion, but the Governing Board, anxious to maintain shipboard amity, had tacitly sanctioned the establishment of an enclave. Arch visualized the Quarter, which surrounded two adjacent stairwells, as the magnetic field generated by a pair of charged rods.

He could feel the transition as he moved along the corridor, almost to the door. The next person he passed wore a crucifix on a thin chain round her neck, which was a danger in low gravity and illegal above the pods. He nodded and offered a smile, which she returned after a startled second. Most of the doors, he noticed, bore crosses wrought in a semblance of wood, some with a writhing figure outstretched.

Madame Lee lived in a dorm for single women, which was configured into a common room during waking hours. The door slid open to disclose a translucent partition a few steps beyond, and a soft chime sounded to announce his presence. She appeared almost instantly, bowing and smiling as though honored to have such a guest.

"Madame," he said formally as they joined in an old-fashioned handshake. As always, the sight of her prompted a flurry of mixed emotions: affection, nostalgia, guilt, and a stab of helpless grief.

"Archimedes, you look well." The skin around her eyes crinkled with age, but the blue eyes shone undimmed. Arch felt a grateful throb at the thought that the crew, despite the crisis, were not neglecting their elders' health.

He mumbled some pleasantry as he followed her low-gravity shuffle into the larger room. Paper screens, some of them artfully jointed so as to appear free-standing, divided the room into distinct spaces. Arch smelled tea as soon as he stepped behind the partition Madame indicated, which had been pretty painted with a dove bearing a sprig through the air.

"Do please sit down," she said, offering a reclining chair. She took her own seat, a simple cushion, on the other side of a low glass table. So she remembers how I like to sit, Arch thought.

"It has been too long since I have come to see you," he began after they had inquired into each other's health.

Lee made a noncommittal gesture as she looked into the teapot. "You must be very busy with these awful problems," she said graciously. She glanced up at him, however, and Arch realized that she assumed he had come with some specific purpose. He felt an aggravated twinge at the suspicion.

"We're always busy," he said shrugging. "Our tasks will consume lifetimes, and old problems surrender to new ones." That was more plegmatic than he felt, but he did not want to tax her with his misgivings.

"Oh, I don't know," she said briskly as she poured, "I think we're in a terrible mess." She handed Arch his cup, which was not handmade, but part of a service brought from Earth. "They're talking now of fourteen more years to planetfall. I'll never see it. And the kids these days! They've become criminals."

Arch realized with a gust of relief that he had forgotten what an old gossip Miss Lee was. "I ran into one this morning," he told her. "He was pained like a mountain demon." And he regaled the scandalized lady with an account of the defaced stair lights and the report of a woman being threatened.

"Oh, it was worse than that," she declared in response to the last item, invigorated to have news of her own. "She was shoved against a bulldozed and then threatened. They didn't even demand valuables, although that would have been terrible enough. They just had at her."

"There was more than one?" Arch murmured.

"Two," she said definitely. "Both varnished like savages." She put one hand to her breast at the thought.

Madame Lee seemed so exercised at the dissipation of contemporary youth that Arch, thinking she would be amused, told her about the upright Peng. "They're all the same," she insisted. "A generation of vipers."

Arch wondered whether this was the judgment now spreading across the nets or simply Lee's elderly acerbity. "Well, I would not want to have been born to this age group," he said judiciously.

She sniffed. "We didn't work hard all our lives to see things come to this." Arch didn't know whether he was included in that "we," or if Lee was thinking only of her own generation. The severe look she was giving him suggested that Arch was only provisionally exempted from her censure.

Nor perhaps should he be. Madame Lee hadn't worked hard all her life to be widowed, either. Arch felt an acutely uncomfortable blend of embarrassment for her and shame for himself.

She was evidently following his train of thought. "My husband never expected to live to complete his great work. The execution of the projects he envisioned—the orbital cities, the Hanging Gardens—would devolve to younger hands. That he should fall in the course of seeing this great ark to its destination would not have displeased him."

Arch felt his throat thicken. "Doctor Lee—"

"Doctor Lee." Her chin lifted, as though she had scented a quarry. "That wasn't what you called him, though. It was 'Basho,' wasn't it? I'm not surprised at that one. He had Japanese grandparents, wrote haiku in idle moments, did you know that? Ah—" The woman assumed a look of raptorial triumph. "Of course. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*."

Arch nodded. "Until men go to the stars, it will remain the longest journey ever—"

"Oh, nonsense. We are all embarked on a much longer journey, of which William's sixty years brought him hardly the first step."

Arch could say nothing to this. His life's journey seemed so plainly coextensive with the voyage of the *Centaur* that this other dimension—emanating, as it were, at right angles to the stone ship's crawl through spacetime—was one he found difficult to imagine, even to grant the collusive reality he extended to any poem or drama.

Madame seemed to perceive this. "You claim to have left superstition behind you," she said, "you with your rational universe of vacuum fluctuations and phantom particles. Has it given you comfort? You have dug through the soil of materialism and found, not a final bedrock, but blue sky below."

"And it frightens you, doesn't it? Your friends speak of quantum reality as an aspect of Dao and wonder at its immanent potential but, in fact, they are simply frightened. The material universe crumbled a hundred years ago, and you poor folk feel its lack now that the familiar hearths dwindle behind us."

Dark eyes glittered over the teacup's still pool. "How many of your colleagues have a family altar in their quarters? Have printed out tablets listing six generations of ancestors?" She searched his expression and smiled. "Doubtless just a resurgence of interest in genealogy resulting from people's uprooting from their homeland?" The last question was almost jeering.

Arch opened his hands. "It may be you are right. Men's secular faith quavers against the immensity of such emptiness, and their desire to impose order upon—"

Madame silenced him with a wave. "That is not what I mean at all." She sat back crossly, exhausted. "Perhaps you had better leave me. I tire quickly these days."

Arch bowed himself out, abashed. As he stepped through the door, Madame called after him. He peered back around the screen.

"Any good builder should worry about the wind and the water. Be careful what winds you admit into your own heart."



RICH HAD SPENT A YEAR OF HIS TRAINING working with just a screen and stylus, so was not greatly troubled by the current restrictions. He wondered, however, about the crew members who spent much of their time preparing for construction projects on Triton or in Neptune orbit, who relied upon the membrane for their training. Reading texts and watching displays would not hone their reflexes, or even hold their interest.

He remembered his one taste of transcendence during a virtual experience: it was Wehry's *Europa Jet*, and he had paid a week's salary for a top-quality run of the Moment. Even now he could recall it with an immediacy that made his skin tingle.

It had begun as seething magma in the European core, an undifferentiated furnace of compressed incandescence that left Arch with a vivid image of the meaning of "darkness visible." Faults shifted, and after an interminable period spent sharing the consciousness of molten silicates, Arch had felt himself straining upward through weakened crust, cooling as he expanded rapidly, to burst through a rift in the European seabed and explode in a column of sediment and superheated steam. No porn moment or interactive sex game could offer the sensation of eruptive release that Arch had felt at that instant.

The shock wave fractured the kilometers of ice pressing upon Europa's buried sex, and the geyser of magma punched through it

like a fist. Arch felt resistance give before him, and at once he was unconfined and free, rising above the crackleleaved surface of Europa in sudden light. Jupiter, lurid and gibbous, filled the sky above him. A cooling particle, Arch felt his momentum weaken too slowly for Europa to recover its expelled substance, and he coasted into Jove's gravitational embrace.

The rest of the moment was, in its way, equally glorious, but it was the ascent through vacuum in gaudy jovellight that Arch returned to when savoring the memory. The slow fall into Jupiter, through layers like successive worlds, until darkness and pressure closed once more about him, prompted exclamations of wonder from the youthful timbres of his soul, but the exaltation of that slowing rise remained the brilliant point source in his memories of virtual experience, a worn spot through which some larger radiance shone.

He had never used the membrane again, mistrusting its potential for stimulated rapture. Unlike the builders seeking simulations of conditions on the surface of Triton or in some dubious highlands of Neptune, Arch did not need to immerse his sensorium in projections of his work environment. Under happier circumstances, he would have considered the loss of that uncanny technology a blessing.

And today it was probably stranger still. When Arch had used it, twenty years ago, the membrane was a slick film stretched across a doorway; you stepped through it, feeling its taut resilience pull against your skin, then turned about until the membrane was wrapped thoroughly around you. Now users lay in a couch and let neurowires slither between their vertebrae. Can young workers, used to such lassitude, create their own summoned spaces, on a screen or in the forecourts of their own imagination?

Of course they could, Arch told himself; he was getting as bad as Mame. Lee, seeing the new generation as despoiling barbarians. The children were permitted scant access to Moments—their allure was simply too strong for immature nervous systems—so they would hardly miss them.

And in any event, Arch reminded himself as he settled into his study chair and called up a screen on his empty wall, the simpler processing levels were still available to everyone. Nets spread the length and breadth of the Centaur, nodes of gossip and iconoclasm the Council would never touch. Such resources, available to everyone, far exceeded the computing capacity that humanity had possessed when it first went to the Moon.

Arch thought of Madame's last words as he skimmed through the newswire and then dipped into the talk nodes. *Wind and Water*... He knew very well what she meant. For more than a year the nodes had carried discussions of *fengshui*, the forces of "wind and water" that flowed across the Earth and could balk or facilitate good fortune in accordance with how they are channeled. The Centaur, some claimed, cut off from the *fengshui* of any world, had uprooted itself from all natural order; the water pipes and air ducts that ran along the Centaur's axes conveyed *fengshui* but were governed by no wise counselors; the wind from the Sun was *fengshui*, and the Centaur was running incontinently before it.

The cacophony of speculation and dogma crawling slowly up the wall eventually tired Arch, and he hopped to nodes dealing with happier topics, lit briefly, then jumped off. Lying back on his pallet, he activated the screenspace directly above him, which he reserved for bedtime reading. He had three texts set by at any time: an old English poem, a modern one, and something in Chinese. He folded over a dozen centimeters of bedroll for a head rest, relaxed his back muscles one by one, then asked the Onboard to resume where he had left off last night.

*Pantheon:* Hal! They are gone!

*Jove:* Yet you feel no delight  
From the past sweetness?

*Pantheon:* As the bare green hill  
When some soft cloud vanishes into rain,  
Laughs with a thousand drops of sunny water  
To the unpavilioned sky!

*Jove:* Even whilst we speak

New notes arise. What is that awful sound?

*Pantheon:* 'Tis the deep music of the rolling world  
Kindling within the strings of the waved air  
Aeolian modulation.

ARCH ASKED FOR THE DEFINITION OF AEOLIAN, BUT HE KNEW THAT HIS problems with the passage lay elsewhere. What was "the rolling world"? Act IV was set in a forest near the Cave of Prometheus, which put it back in the Indian Caucasus; but the spirits' earlier references to "the deep" and realms "beyond heaven" left the geographical context unclear. Arch searched back for "rolling world" and found it in the poem's second line, where it definitely referred to the outer spheres.

That wasn't it, either; the poem contained other references to the rolling world that plainly denoted Earth. Shelley simply liked the image, which he applied indiscriminately to the turning Earth and orbiting spheres. Rereading the passage again, Arch caught it: a melancholy twinge at "past sweetness." He reminded himself that "past" here referred to a few seconds earlier, and "awful" meant "awesome." Shelley was not invoking any land of lost content; the act comprised little more than rhapsodic antiphones celebrating a universe attaining a triumphant and unified self-awareness.

Then what was troubling him? Arch jumped back to the beginning of the act and began anew, reading quickly through the lament of the confused Forms and Shadows for the death of Time, and the songs of the Chorus of Hours (which were something different) at their liberation. Yet when he came to the Chorus of Spirits' song:

We come from the mind  
Of human kind  
Which was late so dusk, and obscure, and blind,  
Now 'tis an ocean  
Of clear emotion,  
A heaven of serene and mighty motion

SOMETHING TIGHTENED IN HIS CHEST, AND ARCH FELT GLOBULES OF anxiety slide down his spine like mercury. He banished the text with a word and closed his eyes.

It had not been a good day. Arch had been repeatedly accosted by people urgent with exigencies he did not understand, while the problems of his own work blunted his truest efforts. Such days must give way to better. He composed his limbs, willing tension from the eddies of his body, and began the mental exercises that, even in his life's bleakest nights, progressed in clear stages to sleep.

HE CAME AWAKE IN A PANIC, HIS HEART POUNDING at a nightmare too close to know. He blinked at the darkened space, still in the grip of the terror even as it dissolved about him, leaving him condensed and chilled in his slowly apprehended room. The nightmare had receded beyond his reach in the seconds it took to collect himself, and Arch felt his senses return to a scoured clearing.

He got up and crossed the floor, hoping to quiet his racing heart. The room brightened to half-light upon sensing his movement. Arch, who had never lived upon the surface of a planet, found the uniform gloom disturbing, and had the illumination brought up as soon as his eyes allowed. He pulled on his work clothes, glancing at the antique wall clock that protruded like a crystal beside his desk. It was 11:42, three hours before dawn. He sighed.

The corridor seemed less crowded, if only because it was not mealtime or shiftover. The blueshift lights gave Arch an odd feeling; it was the shift he slept through, and he rarely saw them. None of the people he passed was unfamiliar—that novelty was no longer possible—but they were neither coworkers nor people he saw on greenshift, not that he socialized often. He nodded absently at an aunty leading a child by each hand.

What had the nightmare been? A strong wind blowing down a corridor, prompting fear that now seemed disproportionate. A hall

# ... a hitherto unimagined form of existence might be flourishing, at blinding speed, thousands of kilometers beneath humanity's feet.

branch? he asked himself. No, the fleeting memory carried a distinct sense that the wind was blowing from, not to. Then what?

An answer was readily to hand: it was *fengshui*, which he had been reading about shortly before sleep. That didn't feel right, or at least not adequate; it was not, he felt inchoately, a Chinese wind. The rest of the dream eluded him entirely.

He went to the dining room, where he was served coffee by an unfamiliar grumpy and sat near the wall with no one he knew. Two technicians were discussing a newswire that was scrolling across the book propped before them, and after a minute Arch took out his own book and plugged it into the table. He folded it once over so it stood upright and asked for science news.

Earth scientists exploring the magma of the planet's outer core had discovered that the complex patterns of waves that race through discrete thermoclines of the superheated iron showed a self-organizing structure that suggested interactions of a previously unknown nature. Geologists at the Nystad Institute were speaking guardedly of the forms that van der Waals and Fierstein forces could assume under pressures of three million atmospheres, but the press was already reporting speculations that "life" had been discovered at the Earth's core. Suggestions that a hitherto unimagined form of existence might be flourishing, at blinding speed, thousands of kilometers beneath humanity's feet, were being made by popular scientists. One noted that similar regimes could as easily exist within the cores of Venus or the gas giants.

Arch considered these possibilities. Reports that strange fluxions had been observed in the agonized matter beneath the Earth's mantle had been published over the past year, none of them designed to hold the interest of a low-gravity architect beyond the orbit of Saturn. That these transchemical interactions, seen only in the cores of planets, might however give rise to the teeming elaborations of life—that sufficed to penetrate the clouds of indifference and preoccupation. The center of the Earth seemed as lost to the past as the strata of dinosaur bones and petrochemicals bending over it, but the core of Neptune... Arch wondered at those warmer, denser realms beneath the methane haze. They ranged from layers colder than ever seen on Earth to those that were doubtless hotter. "Not a planet," he remembered; "a solar system."

He finished his coffee and left, thinking to seek a fresh approach to his problems in the blue light of an unfamiliar hour. It occurred to him that while Neptunologists would take years to add further investigations of the planet's interior to their schedules, the Council might urge a more politic course. If the Earth's affluent billions developed an abiding fascination with the possibility of intelligent life within magma, the beleaguered folk of the *Centaur* might find their bargaining hand slightly strengthened. Certainly they would be nearer their planetary core than the research teams of the Greater Jovian, who never ventured closer than the orbit of Io save through the telemetry of short-lived probes.

Arch continued past the turn for the elevator, misused by the sparser traffic. Realizing his mistake, he decided to swing around via a side corridor rather than double back, feeling vaguely that it was better to circle about than to violate some natural rhythm—of the wind and water, perhaps—by backtracking. Madame would doubtless sneer, although Basho—

And with the thought of Basho, everything fell into place, crashing heedlessly about his ears. It was on a night like this that the *Centaur* had entered the Sling, soft blue light in the almost empty corridors. They had been at their stations for hours—Arch had slept there, he remembered—but when the alarm came, they had run through

vacated hallways tinted the pale cyan of ice caverns. The *Centaur* was past perigee, already wrested into a new trajectory and receding, bruised, from its glance with the mass of Jove. The stresses on its honeycombed interior had reached their maximum, their display levels slowly dropping as Arch watched them, willing the structures to hold.

As the younger man, he should have gone into the chamber first, but Basho, architect of the *Centaur*, insisted that the responsibility was his. The wall was still intact; the sensors could alert them to critical stress loads, but in the unpredictable flux of strains, not even the higher thinkers could predict when a given support would fail.

Stricken by reverie, Arch turned a corner, and there they were. Two lounged on either side of the corridor while a third stood with arms akimbo, like bandits at a mountain pass. Heads turned toward him as he faltered, three faces painted like grinning demons. Loose sashes and billowing trousers, concealing physique, completed the disguise. One of them stepped sideways, sliding along the wall and into the corner behind Arch, and he was trapped.

"Lost, pilgrim?"

It was a surprisingly bookish remark, which struck Arch as much as its unmistakable hostility. The youth, half a head shorter than Arch, took a step toward him, and Arch had to lock his legs so as not to step back.

"Let me through." The words emerged as a strangled monotone, and Arch sought to meet the young man's gaze, which was lost within the axle grease black of his glistening eyelids. *They know me*, he thought with a sudden shock. Recognized as the surviving member responsible for the calamity that had overcome their lives, he would be clabbed to the ground without ceremony, beaten into the bedrock that had failed to hold up their dreams.

His torch was lifted from his belt, and Arch reached automatically back and felt something crack hard against his wrist. With a cry he bent to one side, and the third figure stepped, reaching, toward him. In sudden panic Arch threw his shoulder against the man, who struck the wall with an angry shout.

Hands were all over him, pulling him down. Something struck the side of his head, and gravity—always stronger in the pods, where Arch came only to sleep—slammed the deck against him. A sharp pain lanced his ribs, and Arch realized with horror that he had been kicked.

People were shouting at the end of the corridor, exclamations that Arch could not make out. Feet clambered over him, a stampede. Arch reached up to grab an ankle but it pulled away, and in a minute someone was bending over him, a moon wide-eyed with shock. Shouts and pounding footsteps faded round the corner.

Folks were asking him questions, impeding his efforts to get up. Arch protested mildly, weakly embarrassed, but the warm welling in his mouth kept spilling over his chin, and he acceded at last to pressing the handkerchief somebody handed him against his lips as hands lowered him gently to the blood-slicked floor. Voices murmured above him, and Arch was trying to explain something—his urgency was clearer than the point he sought to convey—when something hissed coldly against his throat, and the corners and angles of the world all softened to gauzy darkness.

ARCH DROPTED INTO WAKEFULNESS WITHOUT REALIZING IT AND UNDERSTOOD only when he heard the door open that he had been conscious, unimpeded by thought, for some indeterminate period. A nurse, who had doubtless been apprised of his waking, leaped into his field of vision. "And how are you feeling this morning?"

It can't be morning, Arch thought. The nurse is either on a different shift or routinely asks that question. "I feel fine," he started to

# He dreamed of encountering demons on a windswept path, goatfooted creatures acclimated to thinner air than he.

say, but realized that his mouth, hugely swollen on one side, was pressing against broken teeth. The act of moving his jaw sent a bolt of pain through his skull.

"That must have been quite a fall you took," the nurse observed as he drew a glass of water.

"Not a fall," Arch mumbled indistinctly.

"You may not remember clearly for some time," the nurse guided a straw toward Arch, and he drank slowly, thinking. The wall chart was over the head of the bed, out of the patient's sight, but Arch could see the time display reflected on the nurse's name tag: it was late afternoon.

"The doctor will be in to see you shortly," the nurse said on his way out; but Arch's next visitor was a woman he remembered from Ship Security. She stood gazing down at him, compelling Arch to lift himself gingerly into a sitting position.

"You were attacked by three Wild Boys in face paint," she said after a minimum of preliminaries.

"The nurse seems to think differently. Have you actually entered a more politic account in my medical records?"

She ignored this. "Were you able to distinguish their features or anything else that would allow you to recognize them?"

Arch gave her what descriptions he could remember, adding, "The designs resembled the expressions you see on angry Tibetan deities. Perhaps the students had seen some in their studies."

The cop made a note. "One of the witnesses said that the assailant standing over you shouted something into your ear before running away. Do you remember what he said?"

Arch was mystified. "They were kicking and punching me, weren't they? Surely none of them had anything to tell me."

"Perhaps the memory will return. You indeed may not remember clearly for some time." Which made plain, Arch realized later, that she had listened in on his earlier conversation.

THE DOCTOR HAD NOT BEEN ON DUTY WHEN ARCH WAS BROUGHT IN, and she confessed herself fascinated with his injuries. "Treatment was straightforward, of course," she remarked as she peeled back a dressing to study his side, "but the minute your condition was described to Diagnostic, it said *personal assault*. I have never actually seen a case."

Arch, who had been denied a mirror by the nurse, was examining his battered features morosely. One eye was blackened, and his left jaw bulged as though he were storing nuts there. "I'm having trouble remembering events just before I lost consciousness."

"Concussion. I can show you the brain scans." She did so, although Arch could follow little of it. "Your memories should return in time, without medical intervention. We don't like to fool with the brain in cases where spontaneous recovery is likely."

"No, indeed." Arch did not share the Centaur's dread of tampering with the mechanisms of the brain, but had no intention of allowing it to be done by a society that spurned such skills. "But you can confirm there was no serious injury?"

"Oh yes." The doctor flipped rapidly through a series of brain images on a chart on the wall facing Arch (evidently some things could be shown to patients), then blanked it. "Your facial contusions will clear up naturally; there is no benefit in administering phages to accelerate the process. And the dentist will see to those teeth as soon as that swelling goes down."

"I will frighten small children in the corridors," Arch observed.

The doctor looked troubled. "Well, we'll keep you here for a few days, at least until your concussion is healed."

That night Arch asked the wall screen facing his bed to give him a newswire, and he scrolled impatiently through headlines announcing reallocations of computing resources and overtures from the United Nation's Science Committee. He had to go into the nets to find the account of three hooligans who beat up a man in Pollux, and was surprised to see himself described as a *ziensheng*, a "gentleman" with the suggestion of mature years. Presumably he should have put up a better fight against the three.

Some of the details were wrong—the victim was described as having been cursed and pursued before the gang ran him down—and Arch considered adding a brief correction. When he gave the command to post a reply, however, he found that he could scarcely focus his mind sufficiently to frame a sentence. Disconcerted, he dismissed the screen and surrendered to sleep, as the nurse (a different one) had suggested an hour earlier. He dreamed of encountering demons on a windswept path, goatfooted creatures acclimated to thinner air than he. Their deformities, he knew, were the consequence of his own careless work, and as one of them backed him against the rocky slope, its distorted features betrayed an unwelcome kinship, as well as something deeper.

A MILD HEAD INJURY CAN AFFECT COGNITION IN SUBTLE WAYS, ARCH decided; it wasn't until the following morning that he thought to wonder about his surroundings.

The plain white cubicle contained his bed and a doc console, and enjoyed the low gravity of the administrative levels. Arch didn't recognize the setting as part of the great hospital floor, where the medical staff could minister to dozens in the event of some calamity; but it might be subdivided from there.

The bed was the standard hospital model whose design Arch had reviewed years ago: at his command a drawer beneath slid forth, disclosing his personal effects. Arch leaned stiffly over to survey its contents: clothing neatly folded, pocket pal, torch, his tiny tool kit. If his clothes had been stained, they had since been cleaned; Arch imagined the security people testing them with forensic probes, searching for blood not his own.

His morning visitor was not his physician but Soong Sapang, the Adjutant to the Councilor who oversaw medical care. Acquaintances were never forgotten on the *Centaur*, where no one retired or moved away. Arch responded guardedly to Soong's solicitous inquiries, knowing that the administrator had doubtless glanced at his chart before coming.

"My concentration seems much better than yesterday," he told her, "although I may not return to work right away."

"I don't think you should leave until you're wholly recovered," Soong said smoothly. "You really don't look well."

Arch got it then. "You don't want me going into the corridors with a battered face, do you? Because I have obviously been beaten, and revealing that would be bad for morale."

Soong frowned. "Your concussion will be longer in healing, and we certainly don't want you working on high-level problems while suffering its lingering effects."

Arch got nowhere with Soong—he was probably unequal to such verbal fencing even with his wits unscrambled—but made better headway with his physician. Dr. Tan worried about a future fall of traumatic injuries when the *Centaur* reached Neopteme and began to build, but had developed a fascination with Arch's tattoo of wounds, which Arch was willing to indulge. Tan described the particulars of Arch's punneling as she examined each site and murmured notes for the chart. Arch learned—if he had been told earlier, he had forgotten

it—that his spleen had been ruptured, and a surgeon arm had laced it back together. He fingered the tiny cicatrix with bemusement.

"And this came from a right boob, different size than the last one," she observed as she moved to a new bruise. "The security people wanted measurements, which may prove approximate."

"The nurse thought I fell," said Arch, who felt he had by now earned a favor. "Surely the chart summary doesn't say that."

"The top does," Tan said absently, "but the real description is underneath." Noticing Arch's baffled expression, she turned to the wall chart and demonstrated how the innocuous summary field had another "beneath" it, which emerged when she pressed her thumb against the authorization square. "In case a description of the patient's history, not necessary for routine care, should be kept confidential."

"I have never seen such a thing," Arch told her in wonder. "Nothing of my knowledge of the ship's design would suggest that such measures were possible." He was more astonished by this than by any of the other discoveries that morning.

**B**Y GREENSHIRT ARCH COULD MOVE AROUND, although he waited until the nurse's assistant had taken away his supper plates before venturing from the bed. He stripped off the hygienic garment, which seemed to combine the worst features of a spacesuit and a sickbed, and climbed unsteadily to his feet. Shaking his hospital gown, he dressed carefully, wincing as he pulled fabric across his contusions. The effort left him lightheaded but gave him an immediate lift, as though a euphoric had hit his veins.

The door opened at his approach—he had confirmed that it did this for everyone—and he stepped into featureless hallway. He supposed that a nurse would be notified directly when his door opened without a visitor being present, so stepped quickly to the commode he found a few doors down. When he emerged a minute later a nurse was waiting for him.

"You're going to injure yourself," she said severely.

"Not in this gravity," he replied cheerfully.

She got him back into his room, where he sat on the bed but politely declined to climb in. Arch explained that he expected to be discharged tomorrow, as his records contained nothing to mandate continued hospitalization. He also declined to don the garment, which the nurse could hardly contest.

Soon he would have counseled against tipping one's hand before negotiations, but Arch knew he would get what he wanted. He slept peacefully, and the next morning explained it to Dr. Tan. The doctor frowned and expostulated and eventually went away (doubtless to call a superior), but by afternoon she returned to explain the terms of their agreement. Arch listened equably, having already foreseen and accepted these points. The officials were setting down the last word, and that allowed them to agree to it.

THE PLANTER'S HOOD LOOKED CREDIBLY WORN AND ACTUALLY SMELLED of mushroom loam. Nobody in the corridors gave him a second glance. Loping unsteadily, a hydroponics worker tired from a day's labor, Arch felt that imposture had liberated him into a kind of authenticity. Eight years ago it would have been rude for a worker to wear his headgear in public, but Arch had often seen such young men trooping home. Wearing a mask in order to disguise evidence of a breach in the social fabric, Arch committed a breach of his own, one made in the furtherance of the social order. The mask of anarchy, he thought.

He stood waiting for a pip with a group of workers and students, none of them speaking. Arch noticed a few near the door edging closer, maneuvering to get in before the pip filled. Disdaining such behavior, Arch allowed the crowd to flow past him when the doors opened, and waited for another pip. A second crowd collected, including a trio of young administrators speaking Mandarin bureaucratese. Ignoring Arch, they chatted blithely beside him, as though his hooded visage had rendered him a statue.

"They could fire off a small probe, using antiplasma technology,

and have it on Neptune three years before us," said one.

"That would be flatly illegal. The Charter gives us an exclusive license to explore Neptune and to share our knowledge under contract terms already established."

"You can't grant a monopoly on any science, so the UN has a pre-text to break that agreement anytime it wishes."

"But remember," said the third one, a woman, "the *Trident* will bury itself in Neptune's atmosphere within the year. That gives us an insurmountable head start."

"The *Trident* is already out of date."

"But it has self-replicating technologies, so it can build more advanced equipment."

"That's assuming that the Science Committee cares to share its new designs with us. Might just be cheaper—"

When the doors opened, Arch stepped quickly to the back of the pip, where he could face everyone. The administrators continued in lower tones as the capsule began to fall. Arch looked at tired workers, one of them a girl no older than his attackers, and thought of pulling off his hood. None of them would start at seeing scrapes on the face of an ag man, although one of the administrators, he realized, might recognize him as no worker.

The greater gravity at the pip's first stop draped itself over Arch's shoulders like sopping blankets. He almost staggered as he stepped out at his level, earning him a glance from one of the administrators. He stumbled to his room, checked to make sure that no one was watching, pulled off a glove, and thumbed himself in.

In bed, he confirmed that the pharmacopoeia flush against his arm still glowed green, then checked his mail only to ascertain that none of his messages were flagged urgent. The redolent suit lay in a heap on the floor, no point in putting it through the cleaner. "Recite something simple," he said.

The Onboard always took longer when asked to evaluate matters of human preference. After a moment it began:

"Days and months are travelers of eternity. So are the years that pass by. Those who steer a boat across the sea, or drive a horse over the earth till they succumb to the weight of years, spend every minute of their lives traveling. There are a great number of ancients, too, who—"  
"No, no," he cried. "Make it a poem."

The Onboard paused, then resumed:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
Floats though unseen among us, visiting  
This various world with as unconstant wing  
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower—

Simple only through familiarity, thought Arch tiredly, but he closed his eyes as its rolling cadences flowed over him. He smiled when the poet confessed:

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped  
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

WHEN HE ADMITTED, "I WAS NOT HEARD—I SAW THEM NOT," Arch murmured, "But does the latter imply the former?" Perhaps the dead resided behind an event horizon, hearing but themselves unheard. The Romantics called into chasms but never thought about higher and lower energy states. Arch's own energy level sank with the effort of this modest thought, and vagrant zephyrs bore him playfully away, off the cracked and shale-spilling slopes of the obdurate earth to the open reaches of sleep, where the spirit, like air, expands to fill the space available, and winds sculpt vapor, earth's exhalations, into every shape that fancy can conceive.

ARCH WOKE, DOUBTLESS AT THE GENTLE CHEMICAL PHRODDING OF THE pharmacopoeia, only a minute before the door chimed and a bot



rolled in with his breakfast. Such happy timing suggested design, and Arch frowned at the thought of his mental state being coordinated with the schedule of a medical program. Of course, he was effectively being confined for political reasons, an indignity he had already arranged to slip.

His mail contained an acknowledgment from his supervisor of the medical leave order, and a more personal note from Peng. Reading both, Arch surmised that he was assumed to be suffering from some stress-related illness, possibly psychiatric. It was a reasonable cover for a man facing no occupational hazards (whom they wished, moreover, to have no visitors), although it might have the incidental effect of demurring what remained of his career.

This did not matter. Arch reflected that his current serenity might be artificially induced, but suspected the blow to the head as a more proximate cause. There was nothing like trauma to shatter the preserved glassware of one's life, releasing the stoppered toxins to combine and blow fuming out the window.

He sent the soiled workslut through a light cleaning, enough to shake off its traces of soil. Nobody saw him slip out the door, not that he bothered to check: anyone who noticed a hooded worker leaving someone's room would assume that he had a good reason to be there.

Arch maintained his erect gait until he reached the pig, although the surge of acceleration through the floor nearly collapsed him. Things were better inside the *Centaur* proper, and he glided, wholly unremarked, to the aft airlock where Peng had taken him three days earlier. The facility was empty, so no one could notice Arch's bruised features as he doffed his hood before changing carefully into a spacesuit. He clamped his own tools to its belt, feeling comforted by their presence. The dockmaster made no objection when Arch gave it his name; he had not imagined that Security would actually embargo his movements.

He drifted easily into the space above the work platform, feeling the tether brush reassuringly against his ankle. Nobody else was visible, although he knew that a decent look down the hull's long axis would bring several work crews into view. Such a vantage would allow one to see the outer reach of the Sail, were it still in place. Arch had been in charge of its painstaking retraction in the weeks before the Jupiter swingby.

Using the towlines, Arch pulled himself to the silent earthworks of the thrust nozzle. No light shone in the narrowing interior, and Arch fired a quick puff, enough to set him drifting slowly in. Peng had said that the walker would complete its task in a few days; Arch couldn't remember whether that time was yet up. Peng had also assured Arch that the chamber's interior lay beyond the reach of monitors, yet had fallen silent as soon as he activated the walker.

Arch's helmet light cast only the dimmest glow onto the nearby surface, which curved into darkness around him. He pulled out his torch and directed its beam across the chamber to the further side.

His gasp at the letters that leaped into view went unheard by any human or other agency: it resounded in his helmet and was gone. A second later the letters disappeared as well, their bright shapes flaring to swallow the spaces between and around them. In a blink Arch was staring at a featureless ellipsoid of light, his beam's uninterrupted play upon the chamber wall.

He snapped off his torch at once, plunging himself back into gloom. The vanished letters blazed in his mind's eye, glimpsed too quickly to read. Arch strained to recall their outlines: *Speak Nothing* of ran the top line; that he had seen clearly. There was a second, longer line, of which Arch could remember only the word you, then something, not a word, at the bottom. A schematic?

Holding the torch up to his helmet light, Arch studied the lens, which appeared to be rimmed with shreds of some fine material. He stowed the torch carefully, wondering whether the chamber was now filled with minute scraps of scorched polymer.

The chamber now shone murky as an underwater grotto, and Arch abandoned any thought of investigation. He didn't know what he had expected to find here: the chamber was utterly empty save for Peng's walker, which (Arch now realized) must have been retrieved

by now. If Peng's portentous manner bespoke anything, Arch wouldn't find it here.

He pulled himself out by his tether, bumping in darkness against the throat's edge as he left the chamber. A disk of stars shone beneath his feet, and Arch drew himself toward it like a mountaineer rappelling through a crevasse in the cosmic egg.

Outside, he turned slowly to scan the constricted horizon, as empty of life as an asteroid. Just because no one was present didn't mean he wasn't being watched, he told himself. He kept his face blandly inexpressive, and even allowed himself an absent smile as he took one last look at the stars before going in.

Lying on his bed, Arch stared at the darkened ceiling and sought to recreate the image of the message in the second before the torch had burned through it. He imagined the thin film that someone had stretched across the lens, saw the light burn through the incised lettering like revelation. The two lines of text, glowing in the air like verses, seemed to hover just beyond comprehensibility; and as Arch tried to relax his concentration without losing focus, it came to him: the schematic, which he had been disregarding, was of course a pictograph.

"Screen on," he said, swinging his feet to the floor. The outline of a rectangle traced itself against his far wall. Arch began to sketch the strokes he could remember, then remembered that anything he put on his system might be recorded by others. "Cancel," he said, turning away with elaborate unconcern. Later he stood in the shower, tracing the pictograph with a finger on the steamy glass partition until its broad outlines were clear in his mind.

**L**U HULAN WAS THE SHIP'S LIBRARIAN, A POSITION almost as superfluous as Historian since both tasks were wholly automated. Arch visited her in her cubicle adjoining one of the larger classrooms, where she sat pondering data on her wall.

"Good heavens," she exclaimed as he lifted his hood. Arch solemnly told her that he had been struck in the face when his tool box came open during a job in zero gravity. "They fear that the sight of my scratches may start more rumors," he said. That didn't explain why he hadn't simply called, but Arch couldn't say that he didn't want to send the pictograph through the system. He showed her a copy of it that he had made on a square of paper. "Recognize this?" he asked her.

Lu studied it. "I see so little *wesmen* these days," she said. "It's fun to guess the characters' meaning from their shape. Those are fish, perhaps. And a box?"

"I may not have copied it perfectly," said Arch.

"I'm sure the system will recognize it," said Lu. She raised her stylus to record the character.

"That's all right," said Arch lustily, taking back the paper. "I know what it means. I just wondered whether it was common enough that most people would recognize it."

"I'm hardly most people, Arch," said Lu, looking at him oddly.

"I was merely curious about whether it was a common image or not," said Arch, a bit desperately. "A friend wanted to use it on a jacket and didn't know if it would seem obscure." Deceit was like engineering, you had to devise backups and redundant systems for even the simplest structure. Arch appeared no better at the one than the other.

"YOU HAVE MADE THEM LOOK LIKE CIRCUIT BOARDS," SAID MADAME LEE disdainfully. "No wonder that clerk didn't recognize them."

Arch bowed his head. The three identical marks at the pictograph's center had been too small for him to recall their detail. He felt a wave of inadequacy rise to constrict his throat.

"You remember these lines, however? The enclosure on three sides, you're certain of this?"

"Yes, Madame. Did I draw it correctly?"

"It means 'box.' If you placed the character for *axe* against the open side, that would mean 'carpenter.'"

"And the heavy line above?"



# He was awakened roughly, a hand over his mouth as others grabbed his arms. Arch opened his eyes onto dark shapes. "Close the bloody door."

"Sky, or heaven."

Arch sat back, confused. "So the meaning is unclear unless I can remember the characters in the middle."

Madame took up a stylus and made several swift marks on a sheet. "Is this what you saw?"

Arch looked at the three lined squares, closed his eyes, and imagined them within the large C with the bar atop it. "That's it," he said. He opened his eyes. "Yours is much more graceful."

Madame grunted. "This is the character for 'ear.' Placing one next to two others means 'to plot; conspiracy.'"

Arch felt his chest tighten. In a strained voice he asked, "A conspiracy in a box? A contained conspiracy?"

Madame shook her head, as though giving up. "If the ears were enclosed by a circle they would be contained or imprisoned. Placing them within the character for a hand-wrought container—how literal do you require their suggestion of this ship to be? And setting it in the heavens; well."

Arch looked at the pictograph with dawning surmise. Chagrin and alarm rolled within him, disrupting further thought. Lameely he said, "Extraordinary what grace and subtlety these pictographs contain."

"This?" Madame pushed the scrap back. "This is schoolboy stuff, concocted by someone who doesn't know the language. All it creates," she said, looking Arch in the eye, "is danger."

Arch met her gaze, feeling his color rise. She knows more than she is saying, he thought. Of a conspiracy? The thought seemed incredible.

Madame reached out suddenly and touched a bruise on Arch's right cheek. He blinked but did not pull back. "You've gotten into some kind of trouble," she said wonderingly. "How could a timid architect manage to do that?"

Arch opened his hands. "It found me in its path, I fear. I merely failed to keep aside."

"You could go to the authorities and spill all," she said. "They would know you for a hapless innocent." She looked at him closely. "But you aren't, are you? You don't know why, but you have resolved not to do it."

Arch felt the blood rising in his face. He did not understand this, nor even how he had betrayed it, but Madame was right. He was not about to take his misgivings to a security agent.

Madame looked at him with a peculiar expression, cool pity cloudy with some other element, the wisps of something approaching respect.

ARCH HAD EXPECTED TO BE AGITATED BY HIS DISCOVERY, BUT LETHARGY settled heavily over him the second he entered the pip. Even the moment of free fall during his trip through the axis failed to revive him; and when gravity returned as he dropped toward Pollux, Arch felt himself sag against the narrow walls.

No messages awaited him in his room, and Arch barely paused to toss his garments into the cleaner before falling into bed. Habit more than inclination drove him to request a poem, and a blackness he did not care to probe prompted him to specify "The Triumph of Life," Shelley's last, unfinished work, the dark irony of which title now suited him.

But while the majestic opening lines

Swift as a spirit hastening to its task

Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth

rejoicing in his splendor, and the mask

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth—

threatened briefly to dispel his black spirits, Arch's fatigue stole over

him as inexorably as the night sweeping over the far side of Shelley's Earth. His eyes fluttered before he got past the prologue, and the pressures of the day collapsed his consciousness like a tent.

He was awakened roughly, a hand over his mouth as others grabbed his arms. Arch opened his eyes onto dark shapes blocking the dim rectangle of blueshift, and understood the hissed "Close the bloody door!" only when darkness fell a second later. He was pulled upright and shoved against a wall before he could complete a thought.

"Don't make a sound," a voice urged in his ear. As a hand—the speaker's? Arch could not get his bearings—was still clapped over his mouth, it seemed an idle demand. Hearing no call for an answer, Arch gave none, which was a mistake. The hand pulled away and smacked his face, hard, then dug into his cheeks and shook him. "You hear me?" the voice cried, angry. Oh God, Arch thought, comprehending, I am in the hands of fools.

He nodded slightly. A red light shone in his eyes as the hand drew back. He could see nothing of his assailants, but there were more than two.

"Where's his clothes?" someone asked. Something, a stick, prodded at his genitals. Terror flooded him, but Arch kept his face impassive. Don't even turn your eyes in that direction, he told himself.

There was movement behind the red glare, but nothing he could discern. A bunched garment struck his chest, and the bodies pressed against him stepped back slightly. "Get dressed."

Arch pulled on the jumper hastily, looking down rather than at his easily provoked captors. This permitted him to avoid the torch's glare, and after a second, details began to emerge through the gloom. Three pairs of booted feet stood about him, worker's trousers stuffed into them in a jaunty manner that suggested junior crew. Arch kept his head down, so he could see no further once the man directing the beam began to play it idly through the room. What light remained came from—Oh no, thought Arch: it came from the reader, which was glowing dimly on the ceiling.

He stood slowly, fighting the impulse to glance up. These young barbarians were probably illiterate and might react badly to a poem. The light shone square in his eyes, but Arch judged the height of the closest man's head and faced him squarely.

"What is it you want with me?" he said, not loudly.

A hand swung out of the darkness and struck him. "Stop that," said another voice. Arch didn't know if the order was directed toward him or the man who had hit him; his ear rang and balance abruptly deserted him so that he nearly staggered.

"Listen, you," said the first voice. "We're getting some answers now. You and your kind have run this ship since before we were born, and everything's falling apart. You don't care if we die in the pods so long as you have your secret farms and escape ships."

"You're too old to have been born in flight," Arch pointed out. "You must have been two or three, at least."

The fist flew out again, striking him hard on the nose. Blood spurted, black in the dim red light. "You shut your mouth," someone said. "We want answers."

Worse than fools. Arch touched the side of his nose, shocked at the blood's warmth.

If his suspicions of constant surveillance were correct, an alarm must be sounding by now. Arch needed only to postpone by minutes whatever retribution the Wild Boys intended. Wondering whether a camera had caught him being struck, he glanced involuntarily to the ceiling, and someone followed his gaze.

"What's that?" the first Boy demanded. They craned their necks to stare, and one cursed.

# Any alarm, it seemed clear, would have to be created by Arch himself; and as they turned a corner, he let his finger trail a smear of blood.

"It's a poem," Arch said mildly. "I was reading when I fell asleep."  
"Read it," one of them ordered.

Letting no reaction cross his features, Arch raised his eyes and read:

Before me fled  
The night; behind me rose the day; the deep  
Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head—

"The deep what?" somebody interrupted.

"The poet is facing east on a mountain slope," Arch explained. The absurdity of the situation was beginning to seem unreal. "The deep is the valley below him, which he is contrasting to Heaven above, even though both are great vacancies—"

"Piss on this," said another. "I've never seen a mountain slope. Show us a poem about *fengshui*."

"*Fengshui*?" Arch repeated vacantly. Did he mean a Chinese poem? Arch remembered Tu Fu's lyrics about wind playing over rivers, clear nights after thunderstorms. But these toughs probably didn't know Chinese, and Arch couldn't predict what the Onboard might produce if asked for a translation. Striving to keep it simple, he asked for "The Wind and the Rain."

"Let's hear it," someone said as the verses overhead abruptly changed.

Arch cleared his throat. "When that I was and a little tiny boy," he began in an uncertain voice. He had not completed the second verse before he realized that he had made a terrible mistake. His audience was stirring before he was finished, and the last line gave onto an awful silence.

"What the hell does that mean?" exclaimed someone angrily.

"It traces life from infancy to old age," Arch began weakly. "When he says, 'The rain it—'"

"Shut up," Arch was slammed hard against the wall. "Get his hood." The Boys rustled about in the darkness—were they wearing goggles that they could see by the tiny beam?—and a musty cloth was forced over his head. Arch adjusted the hood as his door slid open. A hand closed over his upper arm. "Out."

Only two people passed them as they strode down the hall, and each gave way to the four purposeful workers without meeting their gaze. Glancing sideways, Arch saw that his captors also wore hoods, and looked quite like a work crew with somewhere to go. Did he—the older man behind them—appear to be their supervisor? If the hand still firmly upon him looked incongruous, no onlooker paused to see it that way.

Arch was becoming very nervous about the lack of an alarm. The thought of a friend seeing and recognizing him quickly evaporated: he knew virtually no one working blueshift and would in any event (he belatedly realized) be merely endangered should someone notice an abduction in progress and raise a hue. Any alarm, it seemed clear, would have to be created by Arch himself; and as they turned a corner, he let his finger trail a smear of blood along the wall.

"Up," said the leader, a beefy youth of just under middle height, whom Arch had been surreptitiously observing. They made for the largest lift on the concourse, scattering an auntie with a brood of children. As the pip doors closed, the three Boys exhaled sighs of relief, then turned to glare at Arch.

"Where are you taking me?" Arch asked. He was reasonably certain they would not attack him in the pip.

"To the periphery of power," said the leader. "You will take us farther."

Arch began to feel slightly sick. "You said something earlier," he

began. "About secret places only the ship's elite can find. I helped design this ship and know beyond any—"

"Shut up." Someone shoved him—it was hard to tell who in the close quarters. "We are going to the heart of the ship, the wellsprings of its wind and water." The Boy who spoke paused, as though proud of knowing such a word. "These powers have been dammed up—worse, misdirected—by the aging and powerful men who mismanage our destiny. You will help us set things aright."

The pip slowed, and everyone tensed. Such a pause could be merely the result of traffic control, but could also mean that someone with priority had hailed a ride. Arch felt the stick dig hard into his ribs.

"If you try to raise an alarm," a voice hissed in his ear, "we'll kill you. Understand?"

Arch nodded. The pip resumed speed a second later, but the charged tension did not dissipate. Arch said suddenly: "I can take you to a secret level directly from this pip. We don't have to enter a corridor, where someone may recognize me."

The Boys looked at each other. "How do we know you're not trying to trick us?" one demanded.

Arch simply looked at the stick held against his side. The leader nodded. "Do it."

Arch reached out and pressed his thumb against the control panel. The panels flickered once, and he inscribed a sigil upon it with his thumbnail. The alarm code, he knew, would not sound silently, so he forbore his chance to trigger it.

"This will bring us to a closed area on the ship's axis," he said, sensing that his continued safety lay in the Boys' peace of mind. "There are no secret spaces or passageways in the ship—anyone suspecting otherwise could satisfy himself with a blueprint and a measuring tape—but this level has restricted access, as meddlers could injure themselves."

The pip slowed to a stop, and the Boys tensed as the door slid open. An empty corridor stretched toward them, lit not for blueshift but with the colorless glow of non-public spaces. Prodding Arch before them, the three Boys emerged as if onto a new world, pulling themselves by handrails in the zero gravity and looking about in wonder at the tall but narrow space, which was laced with ducts and tubings as richly as a section of lymph. A resonant hum, as of liquid rushing through channels, filled the air.

"*Fengshui*," one of them whispered.

"We are both on the axis and in what we call the 'Sleeve'—the imaginary shaft running through the central mass of the ship that joins the two pod arms. These ducts run fore and aft, but if you walk a bit farther—" He took several steps along the slender catwalk, his captors following like a tour group—you see the much larger ducts that force air and water back from the pods. Since they are so long, and run vertically by our orientation, they look like pillars for the entire vessel." He realized his mistake at once.

"The veins of the dragon," said one reverently, drifting forward to touch a curving surface.

"Qi," said another. "The natural energies channeled through the earth. Our earth," he said.

Arch, who stood with his feet planted on the catwalk's adhesive strip while the Wild Boys floated around him, was confused. "How is that like *fengshui*?"

One of the Boys kicked himself toward Arch and wrapped a leg around his neck. "Shut your mouth," he said. "The ship is the dragon, and the dragon is the earth. I can feel the forces around me—can't you?" he asked of his companions, who nodded excitedly, intoxicated by novelty and violence.

"What lies beyond that hatch?" asked one, pointing.

"The blowers operate there," Arch replied, turning to look with difficulty. "No one under twenty is permitted inside."

His tormentor flexed his leg in an easy gesture, and Arch cried out. "Take us there," he said.

"It's not safe," Arch protested, his eyes tearing. "The turbines generate strong electromagnetic fields, and adolescence—"

His voice was cut off as the Boy's ankled tightened against his trachea. "Now," the Boy said.

His vision blurring, Arch groped his way along the railing. The other Boys followed gleefully, one prodding Arch's kidney with his stick, while the leader rode above him like the Old Man of the Sea. It came to Arch, very clearly, that he was going to die in the next chamber. The Wild Boys hadn't thought of that yet, but their exaltation over vanquished authority would drive them to it presently. The rituals of superstition permitted only one response when rising youth overthrew age.

Arch unseized the hatch with a code, then paused as the opening appeared, too small to permit him to enter while towing the Boy round his neck. The vice round his throat twitched meaningfully, and Arch bent to get his head down, tucking his chin almost to the floor as he crawled through.

The chamber was small and unremarkable—an irregular juncture of convex surfaces, like the space in the center of a bundle of fibers—but the Wild Boys gazed about as though they had gained entry to a holy place. Two of them pulled off their hoods, uncovering faces (Arch saw with shock) painted in ferocious colors. One opened a tiny jar and began inscribing a complex pictogram on a surface in black grease.

"That's a vent stack," said Arch nervously. He could feel the magnetic field charging the air. "It is used to equalize pressures between pool levels and the central core. Some of the other ducts are running right now; you can feel their vibrations."

The second Boy put his hands against two ducts and closed his eyes, his expression rapturous. The third one shifted his weight and kicked away from Arch, clipping him in the ear.

"This isn't a secret space," Arch continued, anxiety rising in his throat. "I can show it to you on any blueprint." He reached toward a wall screen, the only vertical flat surface in the room. One of the Boys slapped his hand.

"Tell us instead." The Boys were bouncing about in the zero gravity, as though slightly giddy. Arch realized that they were comfortable in low gravity, but had not spent much time in its total absence, and were discounting the difference. He flinched as a foot sailed past his head.

"That large duct—as you can see from its curvature, its cross-section is nearly the size of this room—runs straight into Castor. Every floor plan shows it as a circle. Most of the other shafts running that way connect with it as some point, so that air and water can be shunted or drained in the event of a breach. It's like a great river, or artery."

This had their attention; they floated about the exposed length in fascination. "Show me," said the leader from overhead. His boots closed around Arch's throat. "And if I see anything but a schematic appear on that screen, I'll snap your neck."

Carefully Arch requested an image of the *Centaur*. It appeared as seen from an angle forty degrees above the horizontal, its levels translucent and visible atop one another like stacked glassware. Arch brought the view closer and sliced away the outer layers, exposing the ship's core. "We're here," he said. "That was where we came in, and there's the big duct. Anybody can ask to see this plan."

The leader showed him aside, although not (as Arch first supposed) in order to test this for himself. Instead he fixed the screen's focus on the central core, then colored the ducts red and paled everything else to near-transparency. "His veins," he said in a strange tone. The smallest Boy began drawing a sign on the screen with a greasy finger.

"And how shall you divine the 'wind and water' forces with which you seek harmony?" said Arch suddenly. He was surprised at his own tone, which caused the hovering Boy to whirl round to glare at him. "Scholars and engineers of *fengshui* study years to attain their expertise; you touch me can scarcely read."

"You wrong me." The small Boy had raised a greasy fist, but the leader stayed him with a gesture. Turning to look at Arch, he pulled off his hood in a fluid gesture. Arch stared.

The leader's face was unpainted, so pallid beside his companion's as to seem blanched. Obsidian eyes gleamed beneath plucked brows and a forehead pulled smooth by a tight black pigtail. Arch saw with surprise that the leader was far from young; with a deeper shock, he realized that she was a woman.

"I have studied the paths of *fengshui*—an engineering discipline, a ritual, and an art—long ere this tunneled rock was flung from the warming sun. When the shallow seas of the Moon were poured, students of the wind and water had already spent years studying the paths of *fengshui* through alien channels and in gravities not Earth's. Such wisdom was not heeded on this vessel, and calamity has already overtaken us. We shall not," she said, eyes locked glittering on Arch, "permit a second such disaster to destroy us."

"And how are you going to stop it?" Arch asked. "Your thugs seem ready to perform a human sacrifice. Isn't that what primitive superstition usually comes down to, especially after it has overthrown a more advanced culture it hated and feared?"

The larger Boy growled, but the leader seemed undisturbed. "You shall not be thrown into the vent stack," she said. "You would not heed our summons, so had to be brought roughly; but you will not be hurt."

"What summons?" asked Arch. His confusion was unfeigned—the back of his head throbbed whenever he moved it—but after a second it occurred to him that he would do better to question everything than admit to understanding her.

The woman compressed her lips into a small line. "No matter. You have been an agent for confusion and malfeasance, and now shall serve the forces of Tao. That both roles shall have been played unwittingly does not matter; the leaf is swept away by the spring floods uncomplaining."

She reached into her jumper and brought out a flat box, as though (Arch thought confusedly) to offer him a cigarette. Narrow tubes protruded a few centimeters from one edge like merlot tips, but the adjacent sides glittered with other instrumentation: audio pickups, a band of temperature-sensitive material, and a tiny grill for current flow. In thirteen years Arch had seen every electronic device on the ship, but this one was unfamiliar. It looked as though it had been handmade by someone lacking access to the ship's nanofabricators.

"This," she said, "you will take through the channels of the ship, from the mountains to the sea. With this device, the true chart of the ship's shot, its hidden and undivulged waterways, will be made known. Only then can our ill fortune be mended and our path made whole."

Arch stared at it disbelievingly. "You want me to crawl into the aqueducts?" he asked. "That's preposterous. Send in your probe on a string, if you want to take pictures."

The woman smiled, and Arch felt hands fall upon his shoulder. "Into the tubes you shall go," she said, "whether willing—and breathing—or not. The river bears away all things, and what cannot be bent to use will be returned to its stores."

HE PUT HIM IN A SKINSUIT AND SAW HIM through the hatch. Arch had drained one section of pipe, wondering whether such activity would strike the monitoring node as odd. He slid through the narrow hatchway like a shell into a rifle barrel and watched them swing it shut. A second later a surge of water struck his feet, and he was carried swiftly through the bore to spill into larger darkness, a bacterium injected into the body of the ship.

His skin tingled as the suit, designed for vacuum, adjusted to the hydrostatic pressure. Arch kicked in the darkness, feeling a faint current around his feet. He switched on the crude recorder and a cone of light appeared before him, turbid with swirling precipitate. No message shone against the tank's far side, only cloudy strains of grayish green, industrial residues from the low-gravity factories one level down.

"Can anybody hear me?" he asked, without great hope. It seemed unlikely that the largest Boy, who had gone through the suit before handing it to him, had not thought to disable the radio. "This is an

emergency," he added, in case the sound of his voice, carried through the water, could reach microphones set in the tank walls. Pears of ubiquitous surveillance could clearly be taken too far.

Arch kicked toward the side of the tank and played the beam slowly across it, careful to illuminate every feature. He realized that the Wild Boys, or at least the society they answered to, believed that the governors of the ship were also adepts of *Jengskui*, who recognized the importance of "wind and water" forces but were hiding their true nature. To Arch, who knew every recess and level of the *Centaur*, for someone to imagine that secret streams ran behind the walls (to what presumed purpose he could not guess) seemed incredible.

He had convinced the Boys' leader that navigating the extent of the *Centaur's* duct system—through filters, treatment systems, and ducts that conveyed currents too strong to swim against—was impossible, and after studying the screen for a moment, she had agreed on a shorter itinerary.

Arch would negotiate through a system of holding tanks near the axis, where gray water was stored as ballast and potential energy. No exit points existed along this route, Arch knew, although if the leader was relying on this fact, she was placing peculiar trust in the Ship's records.

Alone now, free of both his tormentors and more remote surveillance, Arch felt a strange peace settle over him. The still center of the ship was not empty, like space, nor silent (deep gurgles rumbled through the water), but the dirty liquid sustained rather than impeded, bearing him lightly in the hush, the diastolic pause at the heart of his broken world.

The cores of planets, Earth and doubtless Neptune too, seethed with energies and racing patterns; but the cruciform *Centaur* merely eddied at its center: a honeycomb, not a kernel. Closing his eyes, Arch let himself drift.

He was roused from reverie by the sensation of his foot dragging lightly along the tank's side. The ship's spin sufficed to induce faint currents, which were carrying him slowly toward the next chamber. Arch swung the torch before him—even had he objected to the Boys' scheme to record the tanks' interior, he had no other light—and saw the shaft that would convey him into the next chamber. He kicked toward it, allowing the gentle current to draw him in.

Slithering down its narrow length, Arch reflected that he occupied a surprisingly defensible position. His skink suit would free the oxygen from his exhaled carbon dioxide for hours, perhaps long enough for his captors to panic and leave. Should one of them come after him (the doubtless had skink suits of their own), Arch could crouch here like a hermit crab, watching the telltale beam of his hunter searching for him. When the Boy found the entrance and shone his beam into it, Arch would see the diffuse light before the curvature of the shaft betrayed his own presence. As the Boy approached, Arch could dazzle him with his own beam. He could not be sure that Arch didn't have a weapon—a length of pipe pulled free to serve as a jabbing pike.

If the Boy seemed intent on advancing, Arch could retreat, still unglimped, into the next chamber, whose dimensions he knew. Would the Boy venture into a dark chamber knowing his torch had announced him? Perhaps, but Arch could slip past him as he blundered out, back into the shaft and behind him.

But a determined pursuit could have only one ending. The prospect of being hunted through the muck of the ship's holding tanks terrified him.

The chamber widened as he swam into it, but was no higher: it occupied a space between floors, broad and flat like a curled magazine. Arch oriented himself without difficulty, turning so that he faced down in the faint gravity. The floor curved upward ahead of him, fading into darkness after a few meters. And then Arch saw them.

They gleamed in the weak light, still forms hugging the floor like outsize but perfectly symmetrical mollusks. Their smooth surfaces shone pale in the torch's beam, their color indeterminable. Modular structures, standard for storage space or electronics housings: wholly unremarkable save that they were not supposed to be there.

Arch drifted past the door-sized shapes, which extended beyond his tanks' reach in both directions, neat rows lined up like parked vehicles.

No labels or indicator lights, which did not surprise him. Whoever installed them here knew what they were and did not expect others to study them. Even the video images from the probes that patrolled these spaces, Arch thought with a fresh chill, betrayed no sign of their presence.

The implications opened up to him instantly, like a flat projection fanning into three dimensions. Flow-rate algorithms for the passage of fluids through these chambers were constantly calculated in order to maintain ship's equilibrium; the algorithms took no account of these obstructions, yet yielded usable results. So the measured rates were fabrications, the figures that would be expected from the featureless tank interiors, which inspections also revealed. And the careful shiftings of mass undertaken to preserve equilibrium—they should not suffice, as they were based on faulty data. Yet equilibrium was maintained, the ship's precessions control led.

Arch imagined an entire economy of spurious data flowing through the ship's nodes like the winds over the Earth, all superseded by the real dataflows, invisible and even more complex, by which the ship was in fact kept running. Glittering towers of artifice, supreme fictions, unfolded about him in intersecting planes and lines.

And in the reflected light of their facets—those perfect angles that didn't truly meet—Arch felt himself bathed in a warmth that reached into his tissues, working changes. No wild surmise, but a transformation, as the virus *This is how it is* calmly recoded every cell. One need not stand on a peak to glimpse the shadows cross the deeps.

HE SAW SOMETHING," ONE OF THEM SAID AS soon as Arch pulled off his hood. Dripping, he looked from one Boy to the next, wondering what his expression had betrayed.

"Give it here," another said. A hand plucked the recording device from his grasp. The Boys looked at it reverently, as though it might disclose its secrets on the spot.

Arch panted, the center of a spreading wet circle. "And now what?" he asked, looking at the woman. Before anyone could move, he touched the wall screen and a plume of dry air opened at his feet. "Are you going to let me go, or toss me out an airlock?"

"Neither, for now." She put away the recorder with evident reluctance. "You will be returned to your room, where Shudong will keep you company." She indicated the taller Boy, who smirked. "An impractical arrangement under normal circumstances, but your masters have effectively quarantined you already, so you will not be missed."

"You want to keep me under house arrest until we reach Neptune?" Arch asked. Word that he would not be killed made him suddenly giddy.

"Isolation will not be necessary for more than a few days," said the leader. "Our people will soon assume the positions of power, rendering your confinement superfluous."

"He saw something," the smaller boy insisted. Arch looked at his hulking figure, fists now bunched in menace. So did the woman.

"Yaro, although unschooled, is a Sensitive," she explained, almost apologetically. "You encountered something important down there—more than Yaro can discern, perhaps more than you know."

Arch knew enough, but while his captors would see everything when they accessed the recorder, they were by no means certain to understand it.

"Play the tape," he said. "I'm wet and I'm tired, and I've done everything you demanded of me. If I'm returning to my room under guard, let's go." He slumped, hoping he was not truly as tired as he feigned.

The Boys exchanged glances, a complicated set of transactions that left Arch wondering where the power vectors lay. None of them was looking at the displays on the wall screen, but neither could Arch.

"The change in power is itself unlikely to be bloodless," the leader conceded.

"If he's supposed to be in his room," the shorter Boy pointed out, "no one's going to miss him."

At once they swung to face Arch, as though realizing simultaneously that the drift of their thoughts must have reached him. Arch

# Concentrating on their tumbling data streams required an effort that actually hurt: his thinking, he thought, had been bruised.

slapped at the screen, and the urgent chiming of an alarmed quarter-tone filled the room.

The taller Boy swore and raised his stick, but the shorter one had already thrown a knife. Arch felt the magnetic field thicken around them as the blade wavered, like a missile suddenly uncertain of its target, before striking the bulkhead centimeters from his throat. Rebounding loudly, it tumbled through the air, then steadied itself and slid rapidly sideways to click against the far wall.

Two Boys leaped, and Arch turned and scrambled at the screen. One of them crashed against his back as a wall spigot popped open. The tank, its pressure rising for the past minute, sprayed a column of water across the chamber to explode against the opposite wall. Spray roiled through the air in fragmenting globules.

The grip on his shoulders suddenly loosened, and Arch wrenched himself free. The woman, unable to change direction in midair, sailed into the spray's path and was knocked sideways. The smaller Boy, face contorted in bewildered rage, brought up his stick, but a cloud of water sailed into him like a weather front. Shouts of pain—not his, but the woman's—sounded thinly over the roar as the Boy batted at the wave until his leg brushed the jet, which sent him spinning.

Someone grabbed Arch's leg. Shudong, his supposed keeper, was pulling Arch toward him.

Wild Boys doubtless studied low-gravity judo and would know how to immobilize an opponent who tried to kick at them. Arch kicked away from the wall with his other foot, sending him swinging in a slow arc.

An alarmed expression crossed the Boy's face as he realized that he and Arch were rotating around an axis that he had, by pulling Arch toward him, located somewhere in his forearms. Zero gravity is not low gravity, Arch thought as he stamped at the Boy's fingers with his free foot. Water was filling the room, the first surge dissolving into mist as more spilled in.

Arch's body swung round until his own legs reached the water jet, which was gushing with only slightly diminished force. His shins crossed the line of fire, which struck them like a firehose. Arch felt himself being dragged by the water's force, and the Boy, eyes widening at the thought of being pulled toward the vortex, abruptly released him.

Arch was caught like a chip in a catamaran, and struck the wall before he could get his legs under him. "Out!" the woman was shouting. Enough water had filled the room to make breathing difficult, and even Arch (who knew better) felt a sudden fear of drowning.

The two Boys leaped toward the hatch, which naturally would not open. They began to pound frantically on the panel. Kicking himself across the room, Arch reached the wall screen and touched the field that shut off the spigot. The splash and tumble of the water in the room hardly seemed to diminish as the jet faltered and died, while the sound of the alarm seemed to grow louder.

The hatch came open at once, and the Boys scrambled through it. Their leader, holding her shoulder at an odd angle, kicked after them, then paused to look back at Arch. "When the seasons turn, the wind blows otherly," she said, and disappeared.

Pengshai, Arch thought in disoriented jubilation. But I know where the water flows. At once a wave of nausea swept over him. He gripped the handhold in the wall like a seapilot struggling with the wheel, feeling oily spray in his face and wondering whether he was riding his ship out of the storm or down.

HE NEVER LOST CONSCIOUSNESS, ALTHOUGH THE RESPONSE TEAM member who peered cautiously into the room—by then a nearly homogeneous suspension of water and air—declared him delirious to

the hospitaler that netted him for transport to the emergency room. His semiconscious state was seized upon by the waiting security people, who questioned him while the physician treated his wounds, brushing aside her request that Arch be sedated and left in peace. Even in his confusion Arch noticed where the power paths lay.

Later he drifted into a reverie that was not quite sleep, since he remembered wondering whether he was dreaming. He could discern, like shadowy shapes, the aches and lacerations that analgesics were blocking. He realized that the anesthetics were also dulling his emotional response and wondered if he should otherwise be feeling shame, triumph, or relief.

"The gentlemen want to speak to you again," the nurse told him in disapproval, although whether of them or of him Arch could not tell. "If you tire, I'll try to get rid of them." Arch smiled beatifically. Further questions seemed an avenue forward, an inquiry that would pick its way methodically from his beleaguered state into a regime of causality and consequence. He was bemused to discover that his interviewers—not, he concluded uncertainly, the same ones as before—asked the same questions he had earlier answered, as though to catch him in a contradiction.

"Did they attack you because they realized you had erased the data in their recorder?"

Arch thought. "I'm not sure whether the younger ones knew enough. It's possible that they assumed a homemade device would hold the same protections as a standard one, if they thought about it at all."

"Did you activate the field in order to erase their data?" The older man was looking at him intently.

"Not really. Why should I mind if they recorded the insides of the water tanks?" He looked back ingenuously.

"Did the woman ever call you 'Pilgrim'?" the younger one (he was scarcely Peng's age) asked.

Arch was mystified. "No, why would she?"

A DAY LATER, HIS BODY FLUSHED OF PAINKILLERS AND FEELING SCRAPED and wrung, Arch thought to wonder why the investigators didn't ask him what he had seen in the tanks. Were they waiting for him to volunteer the information, or to ask after the undocumented structures? Perhaps all his testimony was being weighed in light of his non-offer. Later it occurred to him that the investigators, junior policemen, might themselves not know.

He lay in the hospital bed he had occupied before, isolated from other patients. The inflexible physician who had treated him several days earlier was nowhere in evidence, and the nurses had turned distinctly cooler after the first day. It was three days before Arch felt equal to checking the nets, and he realized with a mild shock how muddled his thinking had been. Concentrating on their tumbling data streams required an effort that actually hurt: his thinking, he thought, had been bruised.

The chat lines proved to be such a confused torrent that Arch floundered for hours before finding his bearings. Arrests had been made, and there were rumors of a crushed rebellion; no official announcements had been issued, but the names of people absent from work were exchanged in a babel of awed speculation. Arch searched through the messages for names, recognizing only his own.

He sent notes to people who he thought might have wondered about him, but by evening had received no replies. Unable to sort his feelings, Arch spent the rest of the day reading science news, which concentrated on additional data emerging as more earth scientists turned their magnum probes toward the pulses at the planetary core. Only the most sensitive devices were able to discern the chorus of

sounds—as rapid and various as the vibration of water molecules in a glass—behind the veil of seething noise. Enormous libraries were being recorded, which the fastest thinkers now parsed for patterns and sense. Structure could already be gleaned: whether this represented merely an endogean pounding of waves upon surf or the whisper of reason no one could tell.

Arch did not feel strongly affected by this news, but it was what he dreamed about. He was swimming again through the watery interior of the ship, which curved around him in soft endometrial folds. The water was turbid with nutrients, but he could see a long distance ahead.

"The planets are superdense at their cores," he was saying into the suit mike. "Yet our worlds are hollow. Do we possess some inner vacancy, that we drift through space like chaff, pressed against the surface of these empty shells?"

"We aren't drifting," said Basho calmly. "We are spiraling out." Arch saw his point, but felt that Basho had missed his own. He knew a poem might convince the builder, but could not bring one to mind. He asked the node to display a haiku or lyric dealing with the centered nature of man, but when the characters appeared on a distant wall, they caught the corner of a moving object. Swimming closer, Arch saw a plate of some irregular design attached to the smooth surface, moving slowly like a horseshoe crab. He detached it and held it in one hand, knowing that if he held it over he would see something. The poem winked out, too quickly for him to read it, leaving him suspended in the illumination of his own solitary beam.

The weight in his hand stirred, and Arch fluttered his eyelids open to see an indistinct figure in the darkened room, holding Arch's wrist as he took his pulse. Why not check the readouts on the doc? Arch wondered. He recognized his earlier physician, who turned her head to meet his gaze and raised a finger to her lips. Arch lay still as the doctor leaned forward, shone a blinding light in his eye, then clicked it off into dazzling darkness and stepped away from the bed. When Arch recovered his night vision, the room was empty.

HE RECEIVED ONE GET-WELL CARD, HANDED HIM BY A FROWNING NURSE who plainly disapproved of the expenditure of resources on heavy, rough paper. Arch broke the seal and unfolded the sheet to find a tiny watercolor painted on a cardboard square pasted sideways into the space between the two folds. He recognized it as an Easter lily painted in the classic Chinese manner, cerise against a wash of pale pink. Beneath it the artist had written, in a black calligraphic hand, *Take care*.

Peng visited him once, on the pretext of returning his teapot. He spoke coolly, never referring to Arch's abduction or convalescence save to inquire briefly after his health. Arch guessed that the air of censure was for the benefit of listening ears, but did not doubt that Peng meant never to see him again. The propulsioneer glanced at the card, which Arch had set atop the console like a triptych, the watercolor upright but the admonition set on its side, like a column of Chinese characters. Arch knew that Peng would not manage to recognize the style.

He returned to his room unmolested, incurring fewer stares than he had gotten when wearing a hood. The nets had buzzed so frantically that Arch had expected to find the corridors a hotbed of unrest, but the excited exchanges of rumor found no counterpart in the ordered levels, and he sat at his bare table like a scribe in the Imperial palace, surrounded by chambers of peaceful stone.

Am I bound or free? he asked himself. Were he to attempt to call up his work files, or reenter restricted levels, he would doubtless be informed that he lacked proper authorization. On the other hand, much of his captivity had consisted of his ignorance of his condition: light, striking the bars, causes several to melt into air.

Heartened, Arch went to the dining hall, where he attracted a few curious glances but seemed otherwise unnoticed. The long tables were crowded with families, and Arch, scanning the smaller ones against the wall, chose one occupied by a slouching young man.

"Good evening, Fohai Yung," he said, as he set down his tray. The youth started and glanced down at the name patch on his work shirt.

"Hello," he said, scowling.

"I'm pretty sure we haven't met," Arch said as he shook out his napkin. "I'm Archimedes Zin. Until recently I worked in Ship Design."

"I shouldn't talk to you," said Yung suddenly. "You're in disgrace."

"Officially?" Arch feigned mild surprise. "I've noticed no such thing. You are perhaps thinking of the chatter on the nets, that fount of reliable data?"

This seemed to sting; no one likes to be seen heeding gossip.

"You had something to do with a mutiny."

"Do I look like a dangerous rebel?"

The boy's lips twist in amusement. "Now, you look like a Cravat."

Arch hadn't heard the term before. "Then you are no doubt safe to be seen speaking to me. Or perhaps I am a rebel: Cravats may be in a better position to oppose authority than a bunch of adolescents who advertise themselves by smearing oil on their face. Which sounds likelier to be true?"

The boy frowned and looked down at his plate. Arch said softly: "You are nearly done with your meal. When you finish, pick up your tray and leave without a word. In the meantime, you cannot be faulted for hearing me speak."

The boy almost looked up, but kept his head down. He plucked a scrap of seaweed with his sticks and chewed it slowly.

"I wonder what a reasonable man would rebel over," Arch said. "Certainly not those stupid superstitions about *fengshui* and the esteem of one's ancestors. Nor about the division of material resources: we see the Council members every day, and they are not eating better than us, or sleeping in bigger rooms."

"Still, nobody believes what the Council tells them, nobody at all, have you noticed that? And when we reach Neptune, these things will matter. You can set up easy systems of belief as bulwarks against uncertainty and powerlessness, or you can start asking yourself questions. Breaking lights in the stairwell won't help much."

The young man dropped his napkin on his tray and stood. "Have you ever read *Feelings* of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte?" You might like it. But don't worry if you don't; poetry isn't really important."

Fohai Yung picked up his tray and walked away. Arch watched him thoughtfully, then finished his meal uninterrupted.

The *Centaur* would reach Neptune in six years, at which point the ship would go into Reversal, its tiers and honeycombed spaces dismantled and its spaces reinforced against the moment when the hull, shorn of its pods, slammed into savage aerobraking. Arch had always assumed that his career would end with the methodical disassembly of his masterwork; the structures to be built on Triton and in Neptune orbit would be the work of younger architects, who had spent years preparing for this mission while Arch had held the ship together. Like Basho, his career traced an arc that dropped faster than he had hoped.

Instead he would spend the *Centaur's* last years dismembering other structures, or trying to. Fortune was the man who found a second vocation, this late in life. What did the poet—not Shelley, but the one who truly did suffer—have to say?

And yet I live—I am—though I am tossed  
Into the living sea of waking dream,  
Where there is neither sense of life, nor joys  
But the huge shipwreck of my own esteem  
And all that's dear. Even those I loved the best  
Are stranger—nay, they are stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod—  
For scenes where woman never smiled or wept—  
There to abide with my Creator, God,  
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,  
Full of high thoughts, unborn. So let me lie—  
The grass below; above, the vaulted sky.

High thoughts; well, yes. Arch was not imprisoned, nor lacked for sense of life, and would do well not to liken himself thus. He smiled at the resolution, at once staunch and ironical. But strings in his heart snapped with a twang, and the soft structure wrenched in response. □

## MOVIES

Continued from page 23

writers taking a crack at the story. Meanwhile Lippincott had fluctuated back and forth on whether or not to go with an unknown or a name star in the lead role.

"There was another time when the film was close to going but then we ran into the problem of *Robocop*, which came out and was really loosely based on *Judge Dredd*," says Lippincott. "So it became evident that we couldn't come out and do *Dredd* because *Robocop* had already done the 'cop of the future' story really well. Besides, these things take time. *Batman* took forever to get made; and I actually worked on *Dick Tracy* before I worked on *Star Wars*. That's a shock to a lot of people—they had no idea that *Dick Tracy* had been around for that long."

After numerous false starts, *Judge Dredd* got into gear last year when Stallone was signed, and the actor approved the chosen director, 27-year-old Briton Danny Cannon, whose impressive debut feature had been *Young Americans*. "Most established directors don't want to do a project like this if they're any good," says Lippincott. "It's very tough to do and it takes a lot of energy and hard work. I felt Cannon was very good with the camera and, based on *Young Americans*, he seemed very good with the actors. He was well-rounded and that's very hard to find in one director."

It also helped that Cannon grew up with *Dredd*, while Lippincott was first attempting to launch the feature project, Cannon was a teen enjoying the original run of the Judge's adventures in the pages of *2000 AD*. "I was a great fan of the character and understood the character," says Cannon, who also had a hand in fashioning the final draft of the screenplay. "I wanted to give Dredd a dimension and wanted to give the story much more meat."

*Judge Dredd* adheres pretty faithfully to the lore crafted in the comic, aside from adapting it to a much larger canvas and exploring



The cameras roll on *Judge Dredd*'s twenty-second century city set.

the character's personal life. Lippincott assures us that the fans won't be let down. "We really needed to make him more grounded," says Lippincott. "He was a pretty flat character in the comics, which works in that medium; you can't necessarily do that with a movie. You have to give him some dimension as well as using your secondary characters around him to help give him some depth."

Of course, the die-hard fans expressed some concern with one aspect of the film—the unmasking of Dredd, whose face was never seen in the original comic series, just as his personal life was never a part of the comic's storyline.

"He has the helmet on throughout a large section of the movie before we unmask his character, and we were very specific about when we did that," says Cannon. "If you were not going to unmask him, you would have had to have an unknown play the role. But here you have an icon like Stallone, and it works ten times better."

"If you're going to tell the story of a hero, you've got to see him without the mask...this

moves Dredd into another level. This guy does have a life, and a past, and we get to find out what that is here."

Audience recognition of the Dredd character will be greater among British fans than here in the States, so Lippincott feels the priority is to make the general moviegoing audience aware that *Judge Dredd* is something they will want to see. Certainly last year's *The Mask* and *Timecop* proved that relatively unknown comic book commodities could be transformed into blockbusters, and Lippincott feels the same could hold true for *Dredd*.

"It's definitely more of a challenge to make audiences aware of it," says Lippincott. "Part of the challenge now is building up an anticipation that audiences will be seeing something on the cutting edge and something that has never been seen before, which is very important to this genre. That is a very fragile area and it's very difficult to do—and if you achieve that, then it's an amazing victory."

Director Cannon agrees and observes that low *Dredd* awareness in the U.S. could actually be for the better. "The awareness is down, but that's to our advantage. After all you're introducing something completely new here."

Certainly some aspects of the revisions made to the *Judge* are an inevitable byproduct of the years since the introduction of the series. The original vision of ruthlessness, unerring justice was presented with a large helping of subtle British irony that could well be lost on today's audience. Polls consistently reveal that Americans view crime as our biggest problem, despite the fact that FBI statistics indicate very little change in crime rates over the last twenty years. As our legislators gear up to answer our own crime problems with a striped-down, more "efficient" system of justice, *Judge Dredd* may serve the most classic purpose of science fiction to reveal some truth about our present in the light of an imagined future. □

## New on Video

**Ed Wood:** Martin Landau received a Best Supporting Actor Academy Award for his portrayal of Bela Lugosi in this bittersweet story of the worst SF director of all time. Johnny Depp plays Ed Wood.

**Highlander: The Final Dimension:** Christopher Lambert faces off against Mario Van Peebles in this final battle between good and evil. This exclusive director's cut contains footage not seen before in theaters.

**Scanners: The Showdown:** The latest mind-bending action thriller based on the original characters created by David Cronenberg stars Daniel Quinn, Patrick Kilpatrick, and Krystyne Haje.

**Mary Shelley's Frankenstein:** Kenneth Branagh directed himself as the classic mad scientist in the latest version of Shelley's masterpiece, which features Robert DeNiro as the tortured creature.

**Fatherland:** Rutger Hauer plays an SS officer and Miranda Richardson a visiting American reporter in this mystery set in an alternate Berlin where Hitler still lives, having won WWII and conquered most of Europe.

**The Puppet Masters:** Robert Heinlein's classic novel of alien invasion comes to the screen in a production that should appeal to fans of *The X-Files*. Starring Donald Sutherland and Julie Warner.







The Vietnam War still rages. Man never went to the Moon. And Kennedy is President. *Robert Kennedy.*  
Only airman Derek Scarrow can rescue a world wrenched inside out.

# THE WAVE

BY SCOTT MACKAY

*Illustration by David Beck*

**D**EREK SCARROW, NEWLY ARRIVED FROM VIETNAM, DROPPED A DIME IN THE PAY PHONE AND CALLED CORINNE. HE WATCHED HIS DAUGHTER, LISA, STARE OUT THE HOSPITAL WINDOW AT THE grass in front of the admitting entrance while he waited for Corinne to answer. But the phone at home rung and rang. On the seventh ring, he thought of all the excuses she had made over the years. On the eighth, he thought of all the broken promises. On the ninth ring he hung up.

He stared at the phone. If only the world could be different. But car accidents happened; his daughter had been in a coma for the last five months. A new year, 1978, and the war raged on, showed no signs of stopping. And Corinne...if only the world could be different.

He crossed the lobby to Lisa. How do you tell a deaf girl who's been in a coma for five months that her mother doesn't love her anymore? Lisa looked anything but happy; she looked bewildered, as if the world were a new and frightening place. She stared out at the street, her eyes wide, her lips pursed, then glanced at Derek.

She signed to her father: *Why are all the cars so big?* she asked.

Derek stared at his daughter. What was he supposed to make of such a question? She might as well ask why the sky was blue or why the grass was green, why the sun rose in the east and set in the west. She might as well ask why the wave had come into this world, why it hung in the sky like an ever-present threat. She was confused. Dr. Pesnyak said there might be some confusion. He put his hand on her shoulder and gave her a smile.

"Your mother's waiting for us at home," he said. Lisa studied his lips; she was a good lip reader, and he rarely bothered with sign language. "Are you ready?"

Why was she so uneasy? She looked out the window again, and in her eyes he saw reflected the large cars going by, with their monstrous fins and gaudy chrome-work, Cadillacs, Lincolns, and Packards, mementos to Detroit's excess. Cars were cars. What did she find so odd about them? Her shoulders sank and

she looked a little more relaxed.

She signed: Let's go.

They got in his car, a 1972 Studebaker Deluxe.

She signed: New car?

Dr. Pesnyak said there might be some memory loss. He smiled. He would just have to take this in stride until she got used to things again.

"No," he said. "Same old car."

As they drove through the streets toward home, he found himself making excuses for Corinne. Why hadn't she answered the phone? There could be any number of reasons. She could have been downstairs pressing clothes through the wringer washer. Or maybe she stepped out to the store to buy milk. Or she might have been listening to the soaps on the radio.

Lisa signed: Dad, this isn't right.

He smiled, concealing his concern; had she suffered permanent brain damage in the accident? What wasn't right? What exactly did she mean by that? Maybe he was misinterpreting her hand signs.

"I don't know what you mean, honey," he said.

She signed again: Everything is different.

Different how? Had the last five months really changed him that much? Could she see the horror of Vietnam in his eyes, and the disillusionment of a faltering marriage? Five months. Could she see the anguish of a father waiting for his only daughter to come out of a coma?

"A lot has happened," he said. He saw himself flying over Hanoi in his B-29, saw the fires raging below. "It hasn't been easy." He saw himself sleeping on the couch in the living room. "Your mother and I have been going through a lot of changes. But don't worry. Everything's going to be all right."

He glanced at her, to make sure she had understood.

She signed to him again: Why are you wearing a uniform?

And now his smile disappeared. Because now she made perfect sense. No more toys. A broken promise. But then came her coma. And with things the way they were with Corinne, what was the point? He didn't feel at home here anymore. He felt more at home in the skies above Hanoi. How could he tell her he was going back in two weeks?

**TO DEREK'S RELIEF, CORINNE WAS WAITING for them in the living room when they got home. He wanted mother and daughter to forget their grudges and to grasp this opportunity for a new beginning. Lisa grinned slyly at her mother.**

Mother and daughter embraced. But even as they embraced, Lisa glanced up at her father. She signed: What's with her hair?

A fashionable bubble cut, there was nothing wrong, so far as Derek could see, with Corinne's hair. He didn't know how to answer his daughter so he just shrugged.

And where's my mother? Lisa signed.

Was that a joke? Corinne backed away, having seen Lisa's hand movements, and looked at Derek.

"She's not going to start this again, is she?" said Corinne.

"Lisa, your mother's right here." He gave his daughter a fragile smile.

"Please try to be... can't we just forget everything? I know it hasn't been easy for you two while I've been away, but I think it's about time—"

Lisa interrupted with frantic hand signals: Dad, are you joking? This is Aunt Corinne. Where's Mom? Is she here?

Derek stared at his daughter. Aunt Corinne? If he look on Lisa's face hadn't been so serious, Derek might have believed that Aunt Corinne was just another of his daughter's inventions, the first salvo in an effort to renew the ongoing conflict with her mother. As Dr. Barbara Brettell said, sometimes neglect could turn a sixteen-year-old into a monster.

"Lisa, please don't joke," said Corinne. "I feel bad enough about the accident already. Let's give each other another chance. I want us to be friends."

Lisa stared at Corinne. But you're not my mother, she signed. You're

my aunt. You're Dad's sister.

Her hands were a blur of activity. What did Dr. Pesnyak call it? Post-traumatic syndrome. Derek recalled Dr. Pesnyak's words. Some counseling might be needed, and he had given Derek the name of Dr. Barbara Brettell. Some reassurance, definitely. Humor her. At least through the first period of adjustment.

"WHY DON'T WE GO UPSTAIRS?" HE SAID. "YOUR ROOM'S JUST THE WAY YOU LEFT IT."

Lisa's easel stood in the corner, and her paints, charcoal, pastel chalks, and crayons were stacked neatly on the shelf above. A smile came to Lisa's face, and for the first time since leaving the hospital, Derek relaxed, knew that with time Lisa would return to normal.

She hurried over to her easel and did a quick charcoal sketch of Dr. Pesnyak, exaggerating the doctor's nose, mustache, and eyeglasses. Then she turned to Derek and laughed, in that strange haunting way a deaf-mute laughs. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all.

DR. BARBARA BRETTCELL, A DARK-HAIRED WOMAN IN HER FORTIES, shook Derek's hand, then turned to Lisa.

"I had a long talk with your father," she said, enunciating the words so Lisa could read her lips. "He says you have interesting ideas about how the world has changed since you came out of your coma. Why don't you come into my office and we can talk about them?"

Lisa nodded, accepting Dr. Brettell's invitation.

"Maybe I should come along," said Derek. "To help with the sign language."

"I don't think so," said Dr. Brettell. "She'll respond better if there are just the two of us. I have reams of scrap paper."

Derek sat in the waiting room while they had their session. A light June rain beat against the window and several cardinals flitted by to the maple in the park across the street. What was he going to do with the girl? Maybe he should call his brother Jim. Maybe a stay out on the farm might help Lisa make the proper adjustment.

An hour later, Dr. Brettell opened the door, and Derek saw by the look on the doctor's face that Lisa's difficulties were far graver than he had originally assumed.

"Captain Scarrow," said Dr. Brettell, "can I see you in my office?" She smiled carefully at Lisa. "Lisa, you wait out here."

He gave a brief hand signal to his daughter. Are you all right?

Lisa smiled. She sat down in a waiting room chair and stared at the picture on the wall.

Derek followed Dr. Brettell into her office. Dr. Brettell sat behind her desk, shifted some papers to one side, then gazed at her paperweight, collecting her thoughts. She put her hands flat on the desk and looked at Derek.

"I'm going to prescribe an antidepressant for her," she said. "Because she's suffering from symptoms not unlike clinical depression. She's built a delusional world for herself, Captain Scarrow, one that she's thoroughly systematized, and one with such precise and meticulous detail that... well, I don't know, we might have a hard time dismantling it, at least in the next little while."

"What kind of world?" asked Derek, preparing himself for the worst. Dr. Brettell glanced through some of Lisa's handwritten notes. "It goes beyond what she believes about her mother. She's constructed an entirely alternate history for the world. She says the Vietnam War ended in 1975, with the fall of Saigon to the Communists, and that the Americans pulled out in 1973. She says she's not even supposed to be born yet, that she wasn't born until 1979, that we shouldn't be midway through the seventies but midway through the nineties. She believes that her mother's name is Diane and that you never fought in the Vietnam War but in something called the Gulf War, in the Middle East. She says everything is different, the cars, the clothes people wear, even the movies they see. She's convinced herself of this, and I'm not sure how or if we can reason with her."

Dr. Brettell picked up a pencil, tapped it against the desk a few times, and cast an anxious glance out the window, where the rain drizzled persistently against the glass.

"Is her delusion really so organized?" Derek asked. "You believe

# "...you have to trust me. This is the only world we have. This is the only world we've ever had."

we can't show her books, pictures, and newspapers to tell her how the world really is?"

"I don't know. She's unique. She's just come out of a coma. There may be some brain damage. That could explain it. There are many different medications we can try. But she said some awfully strange things. She said Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles in 1968. She says we're backwards, that all our machines are about thirty years out of date. She says we've gone to the moon. Can you believe that? She actually thinks we've put a man on the moon, and she went into great detail about it, naming names, giving dates, describing the lunar surface...I've never heard anything so exact in my life."

Derek sank deeper into his chair; he'd been prepared for trouble, but nothing like this.

"So what do we do?" he said. "Is there any way we can help her?"

"We can start her on clonazepam. And if that doesn't work we can try isocarboxazide. You have her listen to Bobby Kennedy on the radio tonight. He's making a speech about the new Cambodian offensive. Failing everything else, there's a new coma support group run by a man named Albin Mircheff. That might help her. Either way, I think it's just a matter of time. We'll get your daughter back, Captain Scarnow. We'll get her back somehow."

**DEREK PLUCKED THE NOTE FROM THE kitchen counter before Lisa got a chance to see it, the note he knew would come sooner or later, the one from Corinne,**

the note that told him it was over, that she was never coming back. He didn't want Lisa to see that note.

Lisa looked at him, her eyes half-hooded and drowsy. Dr. Brettell had given her something.

"Why don't you go upstairs and draw for a while," he said. "I think Aunt Corinne's gone home for the day." He felt his throat tightening. "I'll fry some bacon and eggs and open a can of beans. I'm starving. Aren't you?"

She continued to stare at him. She sighed: Dad, I'm frightened. I don't know what's happened.

He hated to see her this way, especially because he felt so helpless to do anything about it. He took her in his arms. She started to cry. He went to have to call Jim. She would definitely have to stay at his brother's farm now that Corinne was gone.

"Honey, I don't know what happened to you in that coma. But you have to trust me. This is the only world we have. This is the only world we've ever had. There's never been anything different, much as you might believe otherwise. Maybe you had dreams. They don't know too much about comas. You were gone for five months. Anything could have happened."

She sighed: The wave came. That's what happened.

"Please, honey...the wave...I was here. It got close but it never touched...this is the only world we have so please try to...why don't you go up and draw? I'll have supper ready soon."

Lisa went upstairs to her room.

He opened the fridge and took out a carton of eggs. He pulled a can of beans down from the cupboard but he was so despondent he didn't have the willpower to continue. He put the beans on the counter and the eggs on the table and wandered into the living room, where he collapsed on the couch. He knew he was no good for making dinner, that if he moved even so much as an inch, he might break into a million pieces. He didn't feel safe here. He felt far safer in the skies over Hanoi. And in this June of 1978, the skies over Hanoi had to be the

most dangerous place in the world. Best to order Chinese, but he couldn't remember whether Lisa liked Chinese. When he was over in Vietnam, he was in his own coma, and whenever he came back, everything was strange.

He had to talk to someone, needed someone to tell him why this had happened to him, and why, despite all his good intentions, his marriage to Corinne hadn't worked out.

He lifted the phone and dialed the operator. He had the operator connect him to Olney, Maryland, a small town just north of Washington, D.C., where his good friend Dr. Paul Karby lived. If anybody could understand this mess, Dr. Paul Karby could.

But the phone rang and rang, and Derek's momentary hope once again faded to despondency. Maybe Paul wasn't the best person to talk to after all. He was a physicist with Special Projects, a brilliant yet cerebral man who had never been married and who had been often oblivious to the worsening dynamics of Derek's marriage. No. Paul Karby was a man who understood the esoteric fringes of physics but had no experience when it came to marriage and family life. The phone rang and rang. He wasn't going to reach Paul anyway. Paul was in the thick of the war somewhere, working on another classified Defense Department project.

Derek hung up. He didn't really need Paul. All he needed was Lisa. He loved his daughter. Nothing else mattered as long as he had that. And as long as he had that, he had his spirit. As long as he had his love, he would have the willpower to make a perfect world for Lisa.

He got up and climbed the stairs. He opened Lisa's door and found her sitting at her easel. And pinned to the easel was the most remarkable portrait he had ever seen, a woman, roughly his own age, with silken hair tied back in a red ribbon. The woman had searching blue eyes and her lips were curved in an enigmatic smile. Lisa looked over her shoulder. Derek couldn't pull his eyes away from the portrait. Why did he find it so riveting? Why was it unlike anything Lisa had ever done before? And why did he find something so familiar about the woman? Lisa lifted the aerosol can of matte fixative and sprayed the portrait.

"Who is she?" asked Derek, his voice barely above a whisper.

Lisa sighed: She's your wife, Dad. Outside, the wind rustled through the chestnut tree. She's Diane.

ALBIN MIRCHEFF, AN OLDER MAN WELL INTO HIS SIXTIES, WITH OXYGEN prongs up his nose, wearing a green cardigan with brown leather elbow patches, leaned back in his armchair and looked first at Lisa, then at Derek. So much for a support group. Besides Derek and Lisa, Mircheff was the only one here.

But Mircheff seemed a thoughtful man, had endured a coma for six months himself and certainly wasn't going to scoff at the fanciful details of Lisa's delusional world, had listened patiently for nearly an hour while Derek had ardently interpreted her hand signs. Mircheff's apartment was cramped but comfortable, full of old books and older furniture, and within the limitations of his health—Mircheff suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—he had made them feel welcome, had provided tea and cookies.

"So she thinks Bobby Kennedy was murdered ten years ago in Los Angeles while celebrating his victories in the California and South Dakota primaries."

"You'd better not talk about her in the third person," Derek gently warned Mircheff. "She reads lips well."

"I know she does," said Mircheff. "I can see she's a bright young woman. And that sketch of Diane. That's exceptional. As for Bobby Kennedy, well, I don't know. He's our president. You can hear him on the radio practically every night. I hear him asking Congress for yet more money to fight the war and I can't help thinking we lost the gen-

# "You'd sooner have the old one back. The world the way it was before the wave came."

the Bobby Kennedy we once knew, the man who wanted peace so much he was willing to die for it."

He gave Lisa a pointed look. Lisa nodded. Derek grew uncomfortable—he felt Mircheff and Lisa were communicating in ways he couldn't fully comprehend.

"By this time next year," said Derek, "the war will be over."

Mircheff shrugged. "You should know," said Mircheff. "You're the soldier."

"Airman," corrected Derek.

"Yes, airman," said Mircheff. "I keep forgetting. Tell me, captain, did you ever get a good close look at the wave while you were up in your B-29?"

Derek thought of the shimmering bands of color, like the Aurora Borealis, only a hundred times brighter, remembered how it interfused with their more sensitive instruments.

"Yes," he said.

"Beautiful, wasn't it? I miss it."

"You can still see it in the southern hemisphere. And no, I didn't like it. It made navigation difficult. Some of our best pilots lost their lives because of that wave."

"Really?" said Mircheff. "I had no idea."

"We had trouble calibrating our instruments."

Mircheff leaned forward and took a sip of his tea. "If the wave could have these small physical manifestations, why couldn't it have larger ones? To be frank, Captain Scarrow, I suffer some of the same disorientation your daughter does. I've read a great deal about comas and I've yet to encounter any documentation remotely describing our condition. A man on the moon. I like that. And satellites. What a great boon that would be to the war in Vietnam."

"I came here for your help, Mr. Mircheff," he said. He looked around the apartment. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. I was expecting something more organized."

"I want to help your daughter, Captain Scarrow. But what I find most baffling, even terrifying, is that she and I share some of the same memories."

Derek glanced at his daughter. How had this man ever convinced Dr. Brettell of his credentials? "Lisa, I think we'd better go."

"No!" She actually vocalized the word, in the tormented way deaf people say words.

"Please, Captain Scarrow. I'm not crazy. I'm just bewildered. I want to find out." He put his cup down. "I had a brother, his name was Miro. And yet now I'm told I never had this brother, that there's no record of this man, my brother, Miro Mircheff. He's the man who cared for me when I got my heart problem, the man I grew up with, first in the back streets of Sofia, then here in America. I've written the Bulgarian Consulate. They have no record of such a man. I gave them dates, places, names, but they told me my information was wrong. I look for my brother's shop in Delaware Street—he was a butcher—but all I find is a park and a fountain. Everybody tells me there isn't a Miro Mircheff, but I know there is. Just as Lisa knows there's a Diane. How do we explain it? We don't. We exhaust all possibilities. Then we think of our comas. We think of the wave. And we can't help wondering. Have we, because of our comas...have we been left untouched...have we...have I really lost my brother? Will I never see Miro again? And will I be continually told that he never existed in the first place?"

The old man stopped. He was winded, red in the face. We exhaust all the possibilities. Was this man crazy? And if he was, did he suffer from Lisa's same chronic delusional state, convinced that he had been summoned to an alternate world?

"So you don't like this world?" said Derek. "You'd sooner have the old one back. The world the way it was before the wave came."

Mircheff's eyes widened. "So you believe us then?"

"I didn't say that. I just want to help any way I can. I want to get my daughter back. Tell me more about the world you left behind." Derek couldn't help thinking of what his old friend Dr. Paul Kirby of Special Projects said about the wave, that the normal laws of physics were no longer absolute, that there was room for variation, even surprises. "You tell me what's so different about this world."

Mircheff looked out the window and a wistful smile came to his face. "It's not that I don't like this world," he said. "I miss my brother." He glanced at Lisa, who watched the old man's lips intently. "Just as much as Lisa misses her mother. In many ways this is a much simpler world. And a much safer one. Everything is slower here. People aren't frightened of each other. There's more innocence to this world. People don't lock their doors when they leave home. The machines are far less sophisticated. There isn't an Einstein or a Fermi or an Oppenheimer." Mircheff's brow creased. "Forgive me, Captain Scarrow, these are names you've never heard of. These are men who don't exist. You've never had nuclear fission, don't know the first thing about the splitting of atoms, and couldn't possibly imagine the destructive force of a hydrogen bomb."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mircheff," said Derek. "But you've lost me. Nuclear fission?"

"Ask your daughter," said Mircheff. "She knows."

Derek turned to Lisa. Lisa gave him a glum nod, as if the splitting of atoms were something she could live without.

## THE NEXT MORNING, TWO MEN FROM SPECIAL PROJECTS came to his door and told him his leave had been canceled, that he would fly to Vietnam in three hours,

that the Catalina seaplane was ready and waiting. This gave him the morning to make arrangements with Jim.

"Remember what I told you, honey," said Derek, stroking his daughter's hair. "This isn't the best of worlds, but it's the only one we've got. I know you'll like it on Jim's farm."

Despite her tears, she nodded. Then she opened her drawer and pulled out the portrait of Diane.

She signed: Please take this with you, Dad.

He looked at the portrait, saw some old teardrops staining the corner. Lisa's tears, knew how much this portrait meant to her. And even though he couldn't understand it, could never hope to understand it, he took the portrait, would cherish the portrait, because it represented all the things that might have been, could have been, and, in a better world, what should have been.

NOT MANY CROSSED THE PACIFIC BY CATALINA SEAPLANE. MOST WENT cramped like sardines in troop carrier convoys. But he was in Special Projects now. His old friend Dr. Paul Kirby had said a word or two in the right places.

They hop-scotched across the Pacific, refueling often—even by seaplane it took them two days.

While up in the sky on the second night, he caught a glimpse of the wave receding far to the south, radiant in its hues of emerald, crimson, and sapphire.

Five hundred miles from Da Nang, the seaplane unexpectedly changed course and turned toward mainland China, to the small island of Wanshan, a tropical paradise the Americans had turned into an air base.

After a short night's rest, Derek, his crew, and the crews of four other strategic bombers gathered in a bunker for mission briefings

and new orders. When Dr. Paul Karby got up in front of the podium, Derek knew this wasn't going to be just another regular bombing run. For one thing, all five pilots had picked numbered tickets out of a hat before the briefing began. Derek had picked the number 3.

"Gentlemen," began Dr. Karby, "you are here today to begin rehearsal missions. Many of you have been involved in the carpet bombing of North Vietnamese military-industrial centers, and despite your valiant efforts, we have yet to deliver a crippling blow to Ho Chi Minh's war machine. Every day the lives of countless marines are lost in the ground war. But we believe that we have at last achieved a scientific breakthrough, a weapon of such destructive force that the North Vietnamese won't be able to dig their tunnels deep enough or disperse their factories widely enough, that through its sheer terror will coerce Hanoi to capitulate to our terms of unconditional surrender."

Dr. Karby walked over to a large object covered with a canvas tarp. "Each of your captains has been issued a ticket with a number between 1 and 5. Out on the tarmac you will find five hangars numbered 1 through 5. And within each of these hangars is a specially equipped B-29, a state-of-the-art airplane designed specifically to carry this new weapon."

Dr. Karby pulled the tarp away and Derek saw a bomb unlike anything he had ever seen before, squat, black, and ugly.

"Gentlemen, I give you Little Boy," said Dr. Karby. "Little Boy doesn't operate on any of the known explosive principles. This one bomb, something that might fit in the trunk of your car, has enough destructive power to level an entire city. One such bomb has already been detonated at the Alamogordo Air Base in New Mexico. The blast was seen from ten miles away and the fierce heat melted the desert sand to glass." Dr. Karby affectionately patted the bomb. "This weapon operates on new principles, the principles of nuclear fission, the principles of splitting atoms. None of you has ever heard of nuclear fission. Only a very select group of scientists involved in the project know of nuclear fission...."

But Derek found he couldn't listen anymore; because he now understood, with shattering clarity, that more than a select group of scientists knew about nuclear fission, that there was a man back home with oxygen prongs up his nose who knew about nuclear fission, that his own daughter knew about nuclear fission, that hundreds, possibly thousands—any and all who had been comatose when the wave struck—knew about nuclear fission and how it could turn sand into glass.

HE WALKED TO HANGAR NUMBER 3 AFTER THE BRIEFING, HIS LEGS MOVING mechanically as he struggled to accept the implications of his discovery. He looked to the south, beyond the palm trees, where the wave glowed like a giant midnight rainbow. Was there a different life out there? A different world? Had there really been a Diane?

He heard footsteps behind him, and turning, saw Dr. Paul Karby approaching over the tarmac. He didn't want to talk with anybody right now, in fact, he was so overwhelmed by his unexpected revelation, he wasn't sure what he should do. Paul kept coming his way. Best to keep it quiet. At least for now.

He gave Paul a smile. Paul put his hand on his shoulder. "Is everything all right, Derek?" he asked. "You walked out of there awfully fast."

Derek shrugged. "I'm just tired, Paul. It was a long trip over." Paul stared at him, the same way he sometimes stared at a complicated mathematical equation. Derek at last felt so uncomfortable he turned away.

"You're sure that's all?" said Paul. "There's nothing I should know, is there? Because this is an extremely critical project, Derek, and if there's something I should... if you don't feel you can—"

"I'm fine, Paul. There's nothing wrong."

Paul looked down the tarmac. "Can I walk with you to the hangar?" Derek again looked at Paul. Why the formal tone? His old friend looked distracted and overworked.

"You don't have to ask, Paul."

"I'm sorry, Derek. I haven't been..." The two men began walking toward the hangar. "I've been..." Derek waited, but Paul didn't finish

his sentence, seemed lost for a moment or two. "So?" said Paul. "What do you think?"

"About what?"

Paul glanced at the special hangars. "About this," he said. "About Little Boy."

"Is this why I haven't seen you since Christmas?" said Derek.

"You wouldn't believe the work that's gone into this thing, Derek. Or the money. This is big. This is so big it's going to change the world."

"Really?" said Derek.

Paul arched his brows. "My honest opinion?" he said.

"Do you have any other kind?"

"I don't know. But it's big. And if it helps end this war..." He trailed off as his gaze settled on the wave. "I'm sorry I had to call you back early, Derek. How's Lisa? Is she all right?"

Derek shrugged. "She's had some confusion. But I think she'll be all right."

"She hasn't said anything, has she?"

Derek stopped, unmoved by Paul's probing accuracy. "What do you mean?"

"She's been in a coma, Derek. Sometimes people say strange things when they come out of a coma. She's all right, isn't she? There hasn't been any brain damage, has there?"

"We don't know yet."

"And she didn't say anything that upset you?"

Derek's eyes narrowed. "Paul, what are you getting at?"

"Nothing," said Paul. "Nothing at all. I just thought you looked... like I said, you left the briefing in an awful hurry. I thought there might be..." He stopped, and a guarded look came to his face. "Never mind," he said. "How's Corinne?"

Derek looked away. "She's OK," he said.

The two men started walking toward the hangars again.

"Good. I'm glad everything's all right. Because I hate taking you away from them, Derek. I know how hard it is. But we had no choice. We had to bump the schedule forward." He looked again at the wave. "That thing. Whatever it is. We thought it was moving away from us. And it was. For a while. But now we think it's coming back. And who knows what it's going to do. We wanted to go ahead soon before it started interfering with our instruments again."

## ENO LA GAY. AIRPLANE NUMBER 3. WHAT kind of name was that for an airplane?

He lay on his bunk trying to collect his thoughts. Out the small mesh window, he saw the wave, glowing, glowing, glowing, like something alive, warping everything around it. What was it going to do this time? Was it going to make the world a better place? Or would the world still be a place of broken marriages, deaf daughters, and endless war? He shook his head. No. The world would be a better place. He took a snapshot of Lisa out of his wallet. He was a father, and fathers always carried the candle of optimism for their children.

He set the snapshot aside and pulled out the portrait of Diane. And he was again struck by the familiarity of the face. Did I leave you somewhere behind me in another world? And will I find you in the next? He looked up at the sky. The wave looked bigger tonight. Diane was out there somewhere in that swirling color. And he would find her. In a world without war, in a world without tears, in a world where his daughter would hear his voice for the first time, he would find the woman in this picture.

He would find Diane.

DEREK AND PAUL SAT ON SOME OIL DRUMS OUTSIDE HANGAR NUMBER three. Paul was a good listener, had let him speak for the last half hour without interruption. Paul took off his glasses and held the portrait of Diane at arms-length to get a better look at the woman's face.

"I have Albin Mitchell's address and telephone number," said Derek. "In case you want to have your people talk to him. I don't

think there's any other way he could have known about nuclear fission. And I know he's not a spy. My daughter knew about nuclear fission too. You can have your people talk to her too if you like."

Paul continued to stare at Diane's face, but Derek saw that his eyes were no longer focused, that he was thinking about something else. He handed the portrait back to Derek and put his glasses back on. He looked around the air base, squinting in the bright sunshine, like a man waking up from a dream, not sure where he was.

"Derek," he said, his voice tentative. "Derek, I've been a government scientist for a long time. Too long. I've been involved in projects I haven't exactly... well, let's just say I sometimes question the ethics. Sometimes I lose touch, and I'm not sure who I should trust. I usually trust other scientists, to the exclusion of all others. We begin to pursue science for its own sake, and we lose sight of our original purpose. We no longer ask ourselves if what we're doing will have any benefit for humankind. We're more interested in our own selfish fascination."

Derek stared at his friend, waiting for more, knowing there had to be a point, but Paul was now strangely silent. Paul looked across the tarmac to where a ground crew ran a check on one of the specially equipped B-29s.

"Paul, I'm not sure what you're getting at."

"Have you ever heard of the Planck scale, Derek?"

"No."

"It's a scale used to measure particles billions of times smaller than an atom. When particles become that small, we call them virtual particles, because in essence they occupy no space at all. That's when you have to redefine exactly what a particle is. Is it mass? Is it time? Space? Is it energy? Or is it all four rolled into one?"

Derek shook his head. "I'm sorry, Paul. You've lost me. And I don't see what this has to do with Albin Mircheff and the wave."

Paul nodded, as if he understood and even expected Derek's difficulty. "Let me put it another way, then," he said. "You remember when I was in Chicago, involved in particle acceleration research?"

Derek blinked. He thought he knew the famous Dr. Paul Karby's career well, but this was something new, something he had never heard of.

"I'm afraid I don't recall," said Derek.

Paul turned toward him. "No," he said, his tone now pensive. "Of course not. It was a long time ago." He looked back out at the tarmac. "We did good work in Chicago. The accelerator isn't there any more. I think there's a park there now. Our research pushed the frontiers of knowledge. We were trying to divide particles until we reached something called Planck's limit, a kind of absolute zero for matter. We believed that matter, energy, time, and space were all part of the same field. We wanted to prove this and were willing to go to great lengths. I'm sorry, Paul. I'm confusing you. I'm a little confused myself. I was feeling you out last night. You probably guessed that. The way I was asking you about Lisa. Forget all that. I see I can trust you now. I should have told you a lot sooner. It's not that I didn't want to tell you. It's just that it's so hard for me. To trust anybody but the scientists I work with."

"I'm still not sure what you're talking about, Paul."

Paul took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He looked tired, old. "We reached Planck's limit, Derek. In fact, we went beyond it. Another government project. I don't have to call Albin Mircheff, and I don't have to talk to your daughter. I'm sorry. I should have told you last night. I know all about the wave, Derek. The wave is what happens when you go beyond Planck's limit."

Across the tarmac another of the B-29s was towed from its hanger by a Jeep, and a second ground crew began running a check.

"Paul, I can't believe this. You mean you... was this a—"

"You have every right to be angry, Derek."

"But you should have... why didn't you come to me sooner, Paul? You could have come to me at any time. I would have been more than willing to help."

"We thought you might find out," said Paul. "Because of Lisa. I'm sorry, Derek. I feel like a fool. I told the others we could trust you but they wanted to wait."

Derek looked away, not sure what to say.

"But what is this wave?" he finally asked. "What does it do? And what about Lisa and Mircheff?"

Paul shook his head and shrugged. "Derek, the wave is like a pendulum," he said. He glanced around the air base, losing his train of thought. He looked so exhausted. "We're too cut off from the world in Special Projects. We're suffocating in secrecy."

"What do you mean by pendulum?"

Paul's eyes narrowed as he searched for the proper words. "The wave comes and goes, Derek. And you never know what it's going to leave behind. It makes a jigsaw puzzle of time and empties the pieces any which way it pleases. As for your daughter and Mircheff... well, we don't know. The mind is a funny thing. In a coma, it shuts down. It becomes immune to time and space, which is what the wave is all about. We were all of us victims at first. We had no idea what we had done. We were oblivious, just like you, living on each new shock with no idea how the wave was changing us." He shrugged. "Who knows how many times it's come and gone? It's funny. I found out the same way you did. A friend of mine was in a coma. I was able to conduct an investigation. We interviewed hundreds of coma victims. And we came to one inescapable conclusion. That we couldn't control our destiny unless we destroyed the wave."

**DEREK SLIPPED OFF HIS BARREL AND took a few distracted steps onto the tarmac, fighting to come to grips with this new information, wondering how many**

times he had been reinvented, how many times he might have been like Diane, or Miro Mircheff, a man who didn't exist. Planck's scale. Planck's limit. Who was Planck? He had never heard of the man.

"So what did you do?" he asked.

"There's a drug we take."

"A drug for what?"

"For coma. We take the drug and we ride it out. Each time we come to a new shock, we try to figure out ways to stop the wave."

His friend slipped his glasses back on his nose, looking guilty and embarrassed, and once again glanced at the portrait of Diane.

"Lisa's good, isn't she?"

"How often have you ridden it out?" asked Derek.

"We have a retreat in Alaska," said Paul. "There's 140 of us. All scientists. We've had to wait eight times for conditions to be remotely tenable. Even though this time around the technology isn't optimal, we knew we had to try. What's it take to make a bomb?"

"Eight times?" Derek walked over to the portrait and picked it up. "So you knew Diane?"

"She was here six of those eight times. With each pass, the wave jumbles things more badly. She might be gone for good, Derek. There's no guarantee that once we kill the wave you'll get her back."

"And you think you can kill the wave?"

"With your help we can. That's why you're here, Derek. On Wanshan, Weapon Number 3 isn't like the others. Weapon Number 3 is going to make a tiny distortion in the wave, a distortion that's going to grow, a distortion that will shatter the wave. That's not to say the wave won't play its trick one last time. Who knows what kind of world we'll wake up in."

"Are you sure it's going to work?"

"A worried crease came to Paul's brow."

"We don't exactly know what's going to happen," he said. "The wave will be gone, at least we hope it will. Like I said, the technology isn't optimal. But if we fail, we'll try again. You'll be with us from now on, Derek. We'll see you on the next shoal. One way or the other we're going to beat that thing."

THE ENOLA GAY FLEW WITH A SKELETON CREW: PILOT, CO-PILOT, navigator, and bombardier.

Derek sat at the controls flying southward. As far as his crew were concerned, they were conducting an atmospheric atomic test, a warm-

# *"The wave comes and goes, Derek. And you never know what it's going to leave behind."*

ing to the Vietnamese, Hanoi had been alerted. Hanoi had dispatched patrol boats to the vicinity to witness the awesome display of power. America didn't want to flatten Hanoi unless it absolutely had to. But Hanoi would see nothing. The weapon they carried was an invisible bomb, made to burst with a spectrum of light and magnetic waves; a question of changing the frequency, Paul Karby said, so that the bending of the sky and the march of time would twist momentarily and shatter the wave into harmless static.

"We're going up," he said, and immediately began to climb.

The B-29 had a service ceiling of thirty-two thousand feet and they were already past thirty-one-five. His co-pilot, Dave, glanced his way, but said nothing. The wave loomed before them now, blocking most of the sky except a small rim to the north. The altimeter reached thirty-two thousand and still they climbed. Dave leaned forward and looked up at the wave.

"We're over the test site now, captain."

Derek nodded. "We're going higher. Up to thirty-five thousand, if we can."

Dave stared at Derek. "Why so high?" he asked. His voice now revealed his apprehension. "We might choke the engines."

But Derek didn't reply, kept climbing and climbing, until the sky disappeared and the ocean vanished and they were surrounded by the sparkling colors of the wave. And in the wave he heard countless voices, all those who might have been, but who were now locked in the wave's fickle web of time. He glanced at his wingtip as the aircraft shuddered, and he saw that the wingtip failed in and out, as if its molecules and atoms had lost cohesion. The instrument panel died. The navigator radioed from his post in the forward cabin.

"Captain," he said. "I'm not getting anything. I don't know where we are."

That's because they were everywhere and nowhere, in a place where time, matter, energy, and space blended inextinguishably in what Dr. Paul Karby called a unified field. The plane shook again, this time more violently. A field where the primal path and substance of the universe incubated in an amorphous potentiality. Derek spoke to his bombardier through the radio.

"Any time you're ready, Alistair," said Derek.

He waited for a reply but none came.

"Alistair, are you there?" he tried again.

But again there came no answer. The plane shook once more. Derek looked at Dave. "I'm going back there," he said. "You take over."

Dave nodded. Derek walked into the forward cabin, past his navigator, who frantically tried to get his equipment working again, and hurried to the bomb bay area.

Alistair sat on the floor cross-legged, immobile, fading in and out like the plane's left wingtip, bathed in a flickering coat of red and blue particles. Derek pushed Alistair aside, opened the bomb bay doors, and launched the weapon.

The bomb rolled out of the plane and its high-altitude balloon immediately inflated, carrying it dangling and aloft into the shimmering bands of color. Derek watched it trail away behind the plane until it disappeared from sight. He then closed the bomb bay doors and ran to the cockpit.

"Let's take it into a dive," he said. He checked his watch. "We've got forty-five seconds to get out of here."

Forty-five seconds. But inside the wave, time meant nothing, and in a few moments, long before they reached even thirty thousand feet, the bomb detonated and sent the plane into a tail spin.

He fought to gain control of the aircraft, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't pull it out of a steep dive. Even the B-29 wasn't constructed for such torture. His left wing, perhaps weakened by the wave, broke off and shattered into fragments. He had no idea if he

had any engine power left because his instrument panel wasn't registering anything. The cockpit filled with smoke. Even before he could give the order to bail out the plane broke apart and fell away from him as if it were made of cardboard.

He found himself falling through a thin blue sky toward the twilight ocean far below. He pulled the rip cord of his parachute. From a false cap on a back motor he extracted a pill, the coma drug, and bit into it hard, ready to ride another failure out with the scientists if the bomb didn't work. But before he got a chance to feel whether it was working, something fell on his head, a piece of debris, and unconsciousness closed around him like a big dark hand.

## **HE WOKE UP A LONG TIME LATER. IN A hospital bed.**

### **At first he couldn't stay awake for more than a few seconds at a time.**

Sometimes he heard the doctors and nurses talking, and from their snatches of conversation, he learned that he had been in a coma.

When he saw snow falling outside his hospital window, he knew it must be Christmas and that he had been in a coma for months.

Then one day he woke up and stayed awake. That's when Lisa and Diane came to visit him.

Everything was blurry at first. He couldn't focus his thoughts. But he knew Dr. Paul Karby stood in the back of the room, watching Lisa and Diane.

"The wave," he said. He was confused. His voice sounded distant, seemed to echo from wall to wall. "Did we get it?"

Paul came forward, said a few words to Lisa and Diane, words Derek couldn't make any sense of, then leaned over Derek's bed. "We got it, Derek."

Like his own voice, Paul's sounded far away. Lisa and Diane looked at each other as if they didn't know what was going on. Derek was so exhausted by asking about the wave that he lost consciousness again and didn't regain it until supper.

This time, he felt more alert. Lisa and Diane were still there. Paul Karby was gone.

"I don't remember anything," he said. Strictly speaking, this wasn't true. He now had two sets of memories. The old set included Corinne. The new set glowed with the benign and soft presence of Diane. "My head hurts."

"You were shot down over Baghdad," said Diane. "Don't try to talk. The doctor said you're supposed to rest." She lifted his hand and kissed it. "I'm so glad you're back," she said. "Lisa, why don't you show Dad what you made him for Christmas?"

"Are you sure you're not too tired, Dad?" said Lisa.

He looked at Lisa, startled by the sound of her voice. "You spoke," he said. "You're not deaf anymore."

Mother and daughter looked at each other, and he saw the concern in their eyes. He knew then that the world had changed, that he was in for a lot of surprises.

"Honey," said Diane, "maybe you're a little confused right now. Why don't we come back after you've had a little rest?"

"No. I'm sorry. Go ahead, Lisa. Show me what you've made."

Lisa pulled a portrait out of her artist's portfolio, the most remarkable portrait he had ever seen, of a woman, roughly his own age, with silken hair tied back in a red ribbon. A portrait of Diane. The portrait he had taken in Vietnam with him—not creased and dog-eared from his two-day trip in the Catalina seaplane—but fresh, and new, and full of promise.... □

# TAUROMAQUIA

**L**UISA, DON'T SMILE LIKE that," I said. "We're not here to enjoy ourselves."

"Sorry, Cesar," she said, her green eyes sparkling over her usual irritating smirk. "I forgot."

"How could you possibly forget?" My voice exploded to full volume.

"Shhh, Cesar, now you are forgetting. Remember where we are, and that most of the people around us have come to enjoy the bullfight."

With a deep breath and sharp clenching of my face, neck, and upper body, I managed to regain control. I had to. She was right, as she often is, being my constant inspiration and adviser. We were surrounded by the enemy here—hardcore bullfight aficionados, whose monstrous thirst for blood and whose resentment for the reasonable restrictions that the civilized world had been putting on this obscenity that calls itself a sport had driven them to indulging in these illegal, clandestine fiestas, where as in barbaric times, they are able to see a noble animal murdered before their very eyes. They were frightening—not just the uneducated rabble, but people who seemed to be cultured, men, women and even children.

I could hardly conceive of them as human. They seemed almost to be a different species, the way they were all so hungry for this awful spectacle, set in a temporary, domed, police-seal-jamming arena in the desert outside of Chihuahua. Maybe they had all evolved from brutish Cro-Magnons while I, and others like me in the Society to Abolish Cruelty, are the descendants of gentle, vegetarian Neanderthals.

What was truly puzzling was the way my beautiful Luisa seemed to enjoy such things, for she was a sensitive artist who shared my deep love of life and beauty. She did not marry me just so I could support her while she got her art career started. Sure, she only joined the Society after I prompted her, and back when Indio and I were still friends, she seemed to be more interested in socializing with him than trying to convince him to

give up and publicly denounce the activity that left him in horrid, constant pain even with medical technology's ability to put him back together, but she is my wife and shares my values. She did give up eating meat after we were married, though she still eats eggs and dairy products, but I feel that someday she'll become a true vegetarian.

But she really adored Indio, with his dark good looks and his torero's pigtail, which was his own hair and not the clip-on kind that has been used since the last century. How they would talk and laugh together! Once, when he lifted his shirt to show us one of his many scars, she ran her fingertips over it with the look of delight on her face that she usually only gets when working the clay of her sculptures. And the lascivious way they would kiss goodbye—not on the lips, at least, not squarely, that is, but almost—while their bodies, just for a second, would be pressed tightly together from shoulders to groin.

There have been times when I wonder if they have had an affair—but I always reject the possibility: Luisa loves me too much to ever do that to me, even if I do look like a brown-skinned Neanderthal.

Thinking about it brings back the burning in my guts. My doctor says my ulcers are coming back. This is because I worry about all the animal rights and social improvement cases I'm always arguing and because I spend a lot of time doing work for the Society. Sometimes I think about slowing down, especially since the killing of bulls in the ring has been outlawed in Mexico, and all forms of bullfighting have been triumphantly outlawed in the European Community, and spending more time with Luisa, who knows how to enjoy life and keeps telling me to relax and join the human race; but the human race can be so inhuman, and there is so much work to be done and so much injustice to be fought.

Indio would always say, "Cesar, you are always allowing yourself to get gored, and you refuse to use the sword. That's no way to live—and no way to die." Then he would laugh, showing his lack of moral sense.

That was probably why he had been so bold as to send an invitation to this illegal bullfight to Luisa

The Society to Abolish Cruelty hoped to erase the barbaric sport of bullfighting from the world of tomorrow. If only the bull would cooperate!

BY ERNEST HOGAN

*Illustration by Doug Andersen*





and me—though, I have wondered if it was me or Luisa that he wanted. He could have expected me to refuse to come and her to sneak off and...no, I can't accept that.

He laughs when I empathize with the bulls, but it is I who will laugh this time, Indio. You should have never underestimated what I and the Society for the Abolition of Cruelty are capable of. Not all swords are made of steel, my friend.

To reassure myself, I checked the nanotransmitter hidden in my bow tie. It was still there, and ready.

I once asked him if he would be willing to trade places with the bull in the ring. Without hesitation, he said, "Yes! It is the most noble way there is to die!"

It made me sick. As sick as I felt in that temporary arena, seeing Luisa smile and waiting for the horrible ritual to begin.

Finally, the lights grew dim. Music began to play. It was a bull-fighting march, not a traditional one, but one I recognized and knew well: Its title was "El Indio Carpenter," composed in honor of Indio, and he had long used it as a personal theme song, often whistling it while visiting with Luisa and me.

There was a pompous parade of the toreros, thugs in their gaudy

backs to him. This was highly irregular. Some of the audience whistled and threw cushions into the ring.

This was quickly followed by a dead silence.

That was no ordinary bull at the center of the arena. It was large, for it has been fashionable and possible to breed them large in this age of genetic engineering. Its color was unusual; neither shiny black nor creamy with brown spots, it was a medium red-brown, more like the skin of a person with Indian blood than that of a bull.

The crowd gasped.

"That's Indio's skin color?" Luisa said.

I looked closer. "You are right."

"What kind of bull is that?" someone yelled.

"His face!" shouted another. "My god!"

"It's Indio!" Luisa screamed.

"Don't be absurd," I said.

"I see some of you have finally recognized me," said the bull, in a voice too deep and more like the roar of a bull than human speech.

It sounded nothing like Indio—but that was his face on the bull's head. I thought of the old Spanish saying: *To become a bullfighter, first become a bull.*

**“I SEE SOME OF YOU HAVE FINALLY RECOGNIZED me,” said the bull, in a voice too deep and more like the roar of a bull than human speech. It sounded nothing like Indio—but that was his face on the bull's head. To become a bullfighter, first become a bull.**

suits of lights who take part in the slaughter. I was expecting Indio to come strutting out in his usual overbearing manner, but instead, a quite different, smaller figure, in a dazzling feminine pink and white suit of lights, glided into the center of the ring.

It was Masako O'Grady, wearing her trademark Geisha-style face makeup. She was one of the new wave of female bullfighters. It hurt me to see young women like her degrading their sex when they seemed to be trying to uplift the world in this new millennium. According to the gossip net, she was Indio's current mistress, which was scandalous, she being at least half his age.

"What's that little bitch doing there?" said Luisa, who had never liked Masako and seemed almost jealous of her. "Where's Indio?"

The loudspeakers fired up as if to answer her: "Ladies and Gentlemen, aficionados of true taurine sport, welcome to this sad corrida. You will be pleased to know that a portion of the funds we have raised will go to the fight to re-legalize the killing of bulls in the ring and to repeal the European Community's unfair law against our noble sport in Spain."

I choked. That bastard Indio! He knew that I would be offended by even indirectly supporting such a cause. No wonder he included airfare from Mexico City with his invitation and tickets to this travesty. Reaching for the nanotransmitter, I almost gave the signal too soon.

"We sadly welcome you to this, the final fight in the fabulous career of one of the greatest matadors of our age, Cuco 'El Indio' Carpenter," the announcer went on.

"So where is he?" asked Luisa, along with most of the restless crowd.

Suddenly, with a dramatic blast of random notes from the music system, the Gate of Fear opened and out stormed the bull—before the sand was smoothed and with all the toreros standing with their

"Yes, my friends, it's me, your old pal and torero, Indio," the creature said.

I went numb. Luisa nearly fainted. An eerie hush fell over the crowd. "Isn't medical science wonderful?" Indio continued. "First it invented penicillin and antibiotics so a torero can be gored again and again without the dignity of dying from infection; then surgeons learned how to regrow scrambled guts, flesh, and bone. It now seems possible for an old torero like myself to go on forever, if he can live with the constant pain."

"Unfortunately, social science didn't want to cooperate. Some foolish, paternalistic people think that the noble tradition of bullfighting has no place in this third millennium," he looked straight at me, "that in these modern times, global civilization is too advanced for the fiesta de toros, that in the twenty-first century, dancing with death is obsolete. So all true aficionados have to go underground to enjoy the corrida in secret gatherings such as this one."

"The thought of retiring to numb away the pain of my reconstructed body with drugs disgusts me. That is no way for a man, a human being, to live or die."

"So, as you have probably noticed, I have had my body altered for this final fight. I have often said that I would be willing to change places with the bull in the ring—that it was a wonderful way to die. Today, I will prove that I meant that."

He winked at me—or maybe at Luisa, I'm not sure—then yelled, making a sound that was a cross between a bull's roar and the yell that he burst into in moments of bold, spontaneous enthusiasm, and bolted into the center of the ring without giving the attendants time to smooth the many foot and hoofprints from the sand. Everyone but the picadors and their horses rushed to safety. The crowd applauded and rose to its feet.

I found myself standing up.  
"No," I muttered. "This can't be happening. It can't be allowed to happen."

I reached for the nanotransmitter.

Luisa grabbed my wrist, stopping me. There were tears streaming from her green eyes.

"Not yet, Cesar, my love," she said.  
She was right. This was disgusting, against all the laws of God and nature, but the bullfight had not yet begun. No law of the land had been broken—yet. Our move couldn't be made until the kill was authorized. My wife often thinks more clearly than I do.

I sat down, swallowed the bile that was welling up in my throat, and almost closed my eyes—but no, these people would suspect something if I didn't act like a proper aficionado.

Bracing myself, I observed the picadors on their horses. How I feared for those poor animals even though they wore bulky, mattress-like petos to protect them from the bull's horns, and Indio had on many occasions assured me that since the use of the petos was adopted, the going of horses was so rare that most aficionados and toreros could not remember ever witnessing it. They circled around Indio, who showed remarkable courage by scorning the center of the ring and charging, causing the horses to briefly panic and rush to avoid him, but the novilleros distracted him with their capes, and the picadors soon regained control and placed many pikes in the huge hump of a neck muscle, weakening it, forcing him to keep his head—and horns—low and vulnerable.

The cruelty was intolerable. If it wasn't for Luisa holding my hand, I would have given the signal prematurely. I thanked God that she was with me. Without her presence and support to give me strength, I would have never made it through that terrible ordeal.

What strength she showed! She kept her eyes locked on Indio throughout the first third of the fight, as the other thugs weakened Indio for Masako. Occasionally a tear would slide down her cheek. When it came time to place the banderillas, she squeezed my hand so hard I thought she was going to break my fingers.

Masako, being the prima donna that she was, placed the banderillas herself. The banderillas were specially decorated with her pink and white colors. Indio charged her with the passion of an aroused lover, and she placed four banderillas in the neck muscle as though she were putting flowers in his hair.

Once the banderillas were placed, she worked him with the cape with all the grace of a dancer. After a few traditional veronica passes, literally wiping the sweat from Indio's brow, she did some breast passes that never failed to arouse the crowd as the horn and breast almost met. Then, taking the cape behind her small, delicate-looking body, she did several butterfly passes which, with the cape behind her body and the way she shook her pelvis, were of a nearly obscene, seductive nature. I wondered if this fight was going to end in the traditional kill or some unnatural sex act.

Indio was brave, never seeking a place in the ring, where he felt secure. But the hideous ritual was doing its job—tiring him, weakening him. His face showed it, along with that disturbing smile.

It was horrible. His blood was so red, so bright—like paint. When the authorization was made for the kill and Masako dropped her hat, I was so upset that I forgot about the nanotransmitter and the Federales tac-squads waiting outside in the burning desert.

I grasped Luisa's hand tighter. Tears streamed down her exquisite cheeks. I shed a tear too.

Indio cleared his great, altered throat and cried, "It's true, a bull learns more in half an hour than a man does in a lifetime!" Then he snorted, kicked up the sand with his hooves, aimed his horns at Masako, and charged.

She ran toward him, leading with the muleta, which brushed the horns as they passed her heart, one tearing her jacket, just missing her breast. At the same time, she drove the sword home, all the way down to the hilt, into the spot between the shoulder blades where it passed the spinal cord and skewered his heart. It was a perfect kill. Indio thudded into the sand that exploded into a crater around him.

Masako's Geisha makeup was spoiled by her tears.

The crowd rose to its many feet and roared with applause like a nuclear blast.

I found myself letting go of Luisa's hand and joining in the standing ovation. Then I came back to my senses and reached for the nanotransmitter.

As I was about to give the signal, Luisa grabbed my wrist.

"No, Cesar," she said. "Don't. Let him be. You have no idea of what the pain was like. This is what he wanted."

"How he wanted to die?" I glared at her and struggled to break free of her grip. She's such a strong woman.

"Yes. And how he wanted to live."

"Disgusting!" I broke free, grabbed and squeezed the nanotransmitter, popping the trigger.

Soon, the shameful, delirious chaos was broken by several Federales tac-squads bursting into the domed bullring.

"You are all under arrest for participating in this unlawful activity," one said through a megaphone.

Of course those people couldn't be civilized about it. A riot immediately broke out. The tac-squads had to use their high-powered stun-prods to render the rioters unconscious.

People went berserk all around us.

"Officers," I cried, "we're with you!"

The ruffians then attacked us.

There were all these fists and feet striking me—and savage faces. It all went into slow motion. For a horrible elongated moment, it seemed that Luisa was standing over me with them, hitting me and kicking me.

It must have been a hallucination. Luisa would never do such a thing to me. She loves me very much and shares my values and my belief that cruelty can and will be abolished in our lifetime.

And she was so loving and caring while I was recovering in the hospital. She was at my side every day, seeing to my needs like a good wife. Her company kept my spirits up.

I'm sure that was why she didn't let me see the news of what happened afterward—she knew that it would have upset me so much that it would have affected my recovery. As it is, thinking about it makes me ill.

Who would have thought that once the video of the fight got onto the world nets—I still don't see why broadcasting such immoral material isn't forbidden—Indio would become a global hero? Popular opinion turned in his favor, so much so that Masako was found not guilty of his murder by reason of Indio's consent—a vile perversion of the law! She became the darling of the global media, despite rumors that she cooked and ate some of Indio's flesh after killing him, like some barbaric Aztec ceremony.

If that wasn't bad enough, all this publicity made bullfighting more popular than ever. Campaigns to make it legal—with the kill—sprang up all over the planet, even in places where it was never practiced before. The kill was once again made part of the corrida in Mexico, and bullfighting was re-legalized in Spain.

Indio would have been delighted.

I'm disgusted. Could I possibly be so out of touch with so much of the human race?

There's even talk in the Society of giving up the anti-bullfighting campaign. My wounds have healed, and I'm out of the hospital, but I have not recovered. For weeks I have not been able to work. While recovering from the damage to my psyche, I've been moping around the house, trying to relax, but the media keeps bombarding me with the new global interest in bullfighting. My ulcers are getting worse.

Usually when things get to be too much for my poor nerves, I go into Luisa's studio to watch her work, but her latest piece is a clay model for a life-size bronze of Indio in his bull body. The last time I went to see her, she was lovingly working on genitals, and she had a smile on her lips that sparkled in those green eyes.

I wonder if anything happened between her and Indio...

No, I'm ashamed to even think of it. Luisa loves me too much to ever betray me. □



Camille's only defense against the queen was the most dangerous weapon of them all...

# A GRAIN OF TRUTH

BY DEBORAH MILLITELLO

*Illustration by Don Maitz*

**T**HE WINNER WRITES THE HISTORY—WHETHER it's the truth or not. Heaven knows that Queen Ella wrote her own chronicles, so of course everyone believes her. But I want to set the record straight before I die, even if I'm the only one who reads this account.

My mother was a handsome woman, a devoted wife and mother. Father was a very successful merchant, trading in salt, grain, wine, and fine cloth. My sister Genvieve and I never lacked for food or clothes. We were tutored in Latin and Greek by priests. We learned to play flute and mandolin, and to dance gracefully and to sing. Ours was a happy life. I thought it would always be that way.

When I was eight years old, Father became ill. The physicians bled him, leeches him, mixed herbal potions for him, yet nothing

helped. He died three weeks later, leaving Mother grief-stricken but very wealthy. She mourned a full year before she took off her widow's black.

A month later, Baronet Geoffrey de Moreaux first called on Mother. He came to sell the last of his jewels to buy a dress for his daughter. Soon he came to visit, then to woo and court, finally to propose. I didn't like the way he stared at Mother. His face was too much like a fox eyeing chickens. But his solicitous manner and gracious speech charmed her. He vowed his love for her and his devotion to Genevieve and me. Mother finally accepted his proposal, and they were married three weeks later.

Moreaux moved us all to his house and introduced his darling daughter Ella. I was stunned to silence when I saw her for the first time. She was twelve and tall for her age. Her hair was the color of golden thread. Her eyes were blue as sapphires. Skin as pale and translucent as skim milk. Lips red as roses. Hands and feet, small and delicate. Her dress was made of pink and white brocade, with pearls and lace bordering her neck. She was the most beautiful young woman I'd ever seen, more beautiful than Mother.

*The gentle rush of swaying skirts as everyone was all too wonderful. Suddenly, silence rolled over the widow's wave. That's when I saw her—pale and beautiful as*

"Ella," Moreaux said, "this is your stepmother."

Ella stiffened and glared at Mother.

"And these are your stepsisters, Genevieve and Camille."

Ella looked us up and down, then turned to her father. "What ugly toads they are," she said. She stamped her foot and flounced up the stairs.

I was stunned. I knew I wasn't pretty; neither was Genevieve. We looked like Father, dark and plain. But no one had ever called us ugly before. Genevieve started to cry. I put my arm around her and tried to comfort her. Mother embraced us both. "Why would she say such a thing?" Mother asked Moreaux, appalled.

He shrugged and followed Ella into the house.

Our lives changed drastically. There was no money for lessons or new clothes anymore, not for Genevieve or me. There was always money for what Ella wanted. It wasn't fair. Mother went to Moreaux and pointed out that it was her money, and that it should be used for her daughters as well.

He laughed. "I'll use the money any way I choose."

"But it's my money!" Mother protested.

"No," he said with a smirk, "it isn't. When you married me, all your wealth and property became mine, to use as I will. That is the law."

"But—"

He slapped her so hard, she crashed against a heavy table. "Don't defy me again. Or your daughters will have nothing." He turned and walked from the room.

Ella did what she could to make our lives miserable. She pinched us, kicked us, told us how ugly we were. She delighted in making tears in our clothes, spilling ink in our shoes, taking for her own the few pieces of jewelry we had, making us fetch and carry for her like servants.

Once she told her father that I'd broken his favorite crucifix. I pleaded my innocence. That's when I learned one of the laws of nature and nobility: beauty equals truth equals goodness. Ella was beautiful. I wasn't. So Moreaux believed Ella, and I was punished for doing something I hadn't and for lying about the something I hadn't done. Moreaux beat me with a rod, then locked me in my room for

two days without food or water. If he hadn't let Mother see me the third day, I might have died. I'd never hated anyone before, but at ten years old I learned to hate. I thought things couldn't get worse. I was wrong. My life became an endless series of beatings. Genevieve's, too. One time she broke her arm when Moreaux knocked her down a flight of stairs. I was just happy she was still alive. Moreaux wouldn't spend money on a doctor for her so Mother had to splint the arm herself. Every day Mother had a new bruise or injury. She changed from a handsome, proud woman to a frightened drudge, afraid to speak, hopeless, but she survived. We all survived—barely.

After five years of hell, we were freed from Moreaux. As he rode home from a neighboring noble's house after an unusually lucky night at cards, he was robbed and beaten to death by highwaymen—at least, that's the official story. Rumors said he was cheating, that the noble sent his own men to get back his money and teach Moreaux a lesson. Moreaux had the grace to die.

Mother was widowed again, widowed and nearly broke. The business Father had built had been leached of its profits until it was almost bankrupt. Mother still had her tiny dowry, enough to keep us

from starving, but not enough to keep servants.

"We'll all have to work and do without if we're to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table," Mother told Ella, Genevieve, and me. "No luxuries, no coaches, no gowns or jewels. We'll have to grow our food, clean our house, take care of each other."

Genevieve and I nodded. We'd been taking care of ourselves since we'd moved into Moreaux's house anyway.

Ella looked horrified. "You want me to work?"

"Yes," Mother said. "You're the oldest so you can tend the animals during the day and help with the cooking in the evening. Camille, you—"

"Tend the animals?" Ella shrieked. "Do the cooking? I will not. I'm not a servant! I won't soil my hands for you! This is my house, and you're nothing but common serfs!"

"No," Mother said, "by law this is my house now, whether you like it or not." She sighed. "Ella, I know losing your father is hard for you, but we all have to go on. If we want to eat and live in this house, we all have to help, even you."

"Never!"

Mother stared at her for a moment, then shrugged. "Those who work, eat. Those who don't, won't. It's your choice."

Ella held out for two days before she started helping with the household.

We didn't have an easy life, but at least it was less painful than when Moreaux was alive. I washed clothes and milked our only cow. Genevieve fed the chickens and swept the floors. Ella grudgingly tended the pigs and sheep, spending as much time away from the house as possible during the day, and she learned to cook soup without burning it. She still called us names and made our lives miserable. To get back at her, we called her Cinder Ella because once when she got a smudge of soot on her face, she fainted from horror.

Mother worked from before sunrise until after sunset, trying to rebuild the merchant house as well as keep what we already had. It took a while, but finally we no longer had to worry whether we'd go to bed hungry.

Two years after our stepfather's death, Mother received a letter

with the royal seal of the king. We were invited to the palace, to a ball given for the crown prince. And the prince was going to choose a bride from the young women attending. Genieve and I were so excited. We'd never been to a ball; we'd never been asked. Genieve was still young, only fourteen, but I was sixteen and eager to dance and dance until dawn. Ella seemed almost annoyed.

"Well, it's about time that someone remembered who I am," she said.

"Oh, Mother, can we go?" I asked, almost afraid to hope.

Mother smiled. "I think it's possible."

"But what about clothes?" Genieve asked. "We don't have anything fine enough for the palace."

"Well," Mother said, "business has been more profitable this year. I think we could afford material for dresses for the three of you."

"But what about you?" I asked.

"I have a dress that will do, one I've saved all these years." Mother patted me on the shoulder. "Now back to your chores. The ball isn't for a week yet."

That week seemed to drag on. Mother secretly bought material and sewed the dresses for us three girls. I begged to see them, but she just laughed and said she wanted to surprise us.

The afternoon of the ball she called us to her room. There on the bed were three satin gowns, the most beautiful gowns I'd ever seen. Genieve's was violet with silver-edged lace. Mine was scarlet with gold-edged lace. And Ella's was cornflower-blue with white lace threaded with pink satin ribbons.

"Oh, Mother!" I said as I held up my dress. "It's beautiful!" Genieve hugged Mother. "Thank you, thank you!"

Ella just stared at her dress. "You expect me to wear that to the palace? To have the king and the prince see me in that...that ugly rag?"

My sister and I gaped at her.

Mother said nothing for a moment, then, "Ella, your dress is perfectly suitable for a ball. I made it to complement your eyes and hair, just as I chose flattering colors for your sisters. There's no time to make another dress, nor money. You can wear this or nothing."

Ella crossed her arms and stamped her foot. "I'd rather not go at all!"

Mother sighed and shook her head. "I've done all I can. If you do not like the dress, then stay home, miss the ball. I'm tired of trying to be kind to you."

Ella flounced from the room, slamming the door after her.

Mother rubbed her eyes, then put on a smile for us. "Come, girls, let's fix your hair and get ready for the ball. Who knows? Maybe tonight you'll dance with a prince."

When Mother had finished with us, we looked in the mirror and gasped. We weren't beautiful, but we were striking in our new dresses. And Mother—she was as handsome as when Father was alive. Her auburn hair was highlighted by the dark green dress she wore. I was sure the prince would fall in love with her at first sight. Mother had hired a carriage from the local inn. When it arrived, she tried one last time to convince Ella to come with us. Ella refused, saying she'd rather die than wear the blue dress. Mother threw up her hands, then hurried us to the carriage. I glanced back at the house as we drove down the drive. Ella was standing by the front door, ripping the dress apart and throwing the pieces on the grass.

When we arrived at the palace, I was astonished. I'd never seen such a building before—pure white stone glowing with torches and lamps everywhere. Gardens of roses scented the air. Music whispered from inside. I just stared for such a long time that Mother had to shake me from my trance.

I can't recall much of that night, only feelings. My heart pounding, my feet floating above the floor while I danced with several hand-

some young men—especially Sir Charles de Lenze—joy bubbling inside me. Lights, music, laughter. A voice announcing Crown Prince Malcolm, his dark hair and eyes, his lean handsome face that made me quiver. The gentle rush of swaying skirts as everyone bowed. It was all too wonderful.

Suddenly, silence rolled over the crowd like a wave. I glanced around the hall, trying to see what had happened. That's when I saw her—pale and beautiful as an angel. She wore a dress of purest white that glowed like moonlight. Her golden hair was perfectly curled; her skin, flawless. I'd never seen a woman move as gracefully as she did.

Prince Malcolm was as awestruck as the rest of the crowd. He walked toward her, never looking away from her face, and bowed when he stood before her. She curtsied to him, then nodded when he asked her to dance.

He didn't look at another woman the rest of the evening. She was the only one he spoke to, danced with, shared a cool drink with. They were alone in the crowded ballroom.

"She's the one," I whispered to Genieve.

"The one what?"

I chuckled. "The one he'll choose to marry."

Genieve looked a little disappointed, but another young man asked her to dance and she was soon smiling again.

I was so caught up in the gaiety of the night, I almost missed the excitement. Just as the watchman was announcing the third hour, I noticed the beautiful girl had disappeared. No one actually saw her leave, but she'd vanished like mist in sunlight. Prince Malcolm looked for her frantically. The palace guards didn't see her pass through the gates. There was no sign of her anywhere. The entire court was talking about her as the ball ended in the first light of dawn. The prince was so desperate to find her that he ordered another ball for the next night, hoping she would attend.

I was exhausted by the time we reached home, but I couldn't sleep.

I was too excited. "Mother, can we go to the ball tonight? Please?"

She yawned and smiled and nodded her head. "Why not? But we still have work to do before we can enjoy ourselves. Animals to be fed, house to clean." She yawned again. "Well, at least the animals must be fed. Then we can all sleep for the afternoon."

Ella was nowhere to be seen. I had to feed the sheep, goats, and chickens. We had a light breakfast, then we all went to bed.

That evening, Ella came to the kitchen long enough to tell us she still wouldn't go with us. Mother didn't bother trying to talk her out of staying home. I didn't care. If Ella wanted to sit at home and miss all the dancing, that was her choice. We left as the sun was sinking below the horizon.

The ballroom was more crowded than the night before.

Word of the beautiful girl had spread throughout the kingdom, bringing the curious who had missed the previous ball. The candles had burned down halfway when the beautiful girl appeared at the entrance to the ballroom. I hadn't thought she could've looked more beautiful than the night before. I was wrong. This time she was wearing a golden dress that shone like the sun. Prince Malcolm never left her side. The ball was grander than the first one. Charles de Lenze and I danced so much, I didn't realize that the night had nearly gone until I heard Prince Malcolm calling for the guards. The girl had slipped away again. Genieve told me that the prince had been talking with the mysterious girl, sipping a cup of white wine and pointing out various members of the court, when she just wasn't beside him anymore. I was beginning to wonder if the girl were bewitched or simply invisible. After all, who would leave the prince when he was obviously charmed by her?

We went home at dawn, tired but delighted. Another night to press between the pages of my memory, to be savored in years to come. I knew I'd never be this happy again.

We were all surprised when a messenger arrived with an invitation to a third ball. I thought Genieve was going to piddle to death at the prospect. I wasn't as excited; two nights of dancing 'til dawn were plenty for me. However, since I probably wouldn't see the inside of the palace for the rest of my life, I decided I might as well enjoy one

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# CURSE OF THE SIMULACRUM'S WIFE

BY BRUCE BOSTON

*Illustration by Janet Aulisio Dannheiser*

SHE DOESN'T KNOW HOW they have done it or why they have done it or when the vile deed was committed, but she knows they have done it nonetheless. She can't pinpoint the exact moment the knowledge of their deception slowly began to dawn upon her, to strike one day with lightning clarity, the force of its thunderous aftermath driving home a realization that caused her heart to leap and leap again within its cage

of bone, a revelation so abominable it made her limbs jerk and tremble with a sensation nearly epileptic in intensity. But strike it did. And of this one thing, if of nothing else in all the world, she now feels certain. The man who sleeps beside her each night, thin snores trickling from thin pink lips, familiar lank brown hair massed upon the pillow, one careless arm draped across her hips, holding her to the bed—while she sits propped against the pillows and stares at the darkened walls, the darkened furniture, the darkened pictures indistinguishable from the man she married!

George Lancer, B.A. Dartmouth, Phi Beta Kappa, class valedictorian, M.B.A. Harvard, brilliant across the board, destined for eminent success, a tasteful four years her senior—"Welcome, welcome," her mother had trilled, and even her taciturn father had

for once managed something that could be taken for an amiable grunt—George Lancer, study bag, he of the lean-and-hungry look, the soundless tread, who with dogged persistence had pursued her throughout her junior and senior years at Bryn Mawr, to whose dubious charms she had finally succumbed for lack of another, with whom she had entered into a future secure and glimmering with promise, George no-middle-initial Lancer, the only husband and lover she has ever known, her "George-Porgie," has disappeared completely to be replaced by someone... something?... else.

Once he was tall and lanky with straight brown hair and sad puppy-dog eyes blinking myopically from behind thick lenses. Now he is tall and lanky with straight brown hair and sad puppy-dog eyes blinking myopically from behind thick lenses. He used to work for some government agency so secretive that he could never tell her the words from which its distended acronymic moniker had been derived. For all she knows it could have been fished at random from alphabet soup. Now he works for some government agency so secretive that he cannot tell her the words from which its distended acronymic moniker has been derived.

Outwardly, everything seems the same as it always has. He still tries to work *The Times* crossword and carps about the inadequacy of the clues. They still play cards every Thursday with the Swensors, and if he thinks no one is looking, he fudges when he adds the scores. This summer, like every other summer for the past decade, they will spend two weeks at their cabin by the lake. He still pretends to hate it when she calls him "George-Porgie."

And whenever she lures him into a round or two of the "remember" game—"Remember our first date?"—"Remember the flowers outside the window of the hotel we stayed at in Duluth?"—his responses are always on the money, his recall seemingly flawless.

"That wasn't Duluth, dear, it was in Saskatchewan."

Almost too flawless. If anything, his memory regarding such personal ephemera, nor-





mally a woman's domain, seems to have become more accurate than hers.

There are definite differences to which she can point, but they are so negligible they hardly seem worth mentioning. Perhaps the thin snores that trickle from his lips seem to rise and fall a bit more slowly, with a deeper pitch (though they still plunder her dreams, these sounds that have measured out all the nights of her conjugal life, this steady rasp and draw that never desists until the first light of morning creeps beneath the curtains). Perhaps his lips themselves seem even thinner, compressed to the edge of meanness. His taste regarding certain foods has definitely changed. Yet such minutiae do not constitute solid evidence that her husband has been abducted and replaced by a look-alike. All of it and far more could just as easily be chalked up to the passing seasons and the changing years.

Outwardly, there is no conclusive differ-

ence she can put her finger on. Yet the spark that lights the soul that defines the specific identity of self, the distinctive illumination that once shone from behind thick lenses and myopically blinking eyes, has been superseded by an implacable glow nearly mechanical in its unwavering consistency. Again and again the truth of the matter strikes home, a silently screaming Munchian litany siren through her brain: this is not the man she married. This is not the man she married! This is not the man she married!

"IS SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU, HON?" He asks over a breakfast of toast and scrambled eggs—for years he always chose over-easy—as he glances up to catch her staring at him.

"Bothering...me?" she answers, wondering just how aware he is of the growing unease that fills her days. "What could possibly be bothering me?" An unease that often chases

panic. "Why do you ask?" She is listening to her own voice so hard, she is trying with such supreme effort to make it sound normal, she can't tell whether it sounds normal or not. She realizes it may never sound normal to her again.

"You seem so quiet lately. I think you need to get out more. There's a sale at the mall today. Why don't you go and enjoy yourself?"

How does he know about a sale at the mall? He never used to pay attention to such things. One more minutiae—make that two with the eggs!—to add to the growing list of inconsistencies. But again, this is nothing solid. Though her mind and heart are certain, all of the evidence she has gathered remains circumstantial at best, inconsequential by any legal standard. With such evidence she could not even get a hearing, let alone a conviction. Any decent judge would laugh her out of court with an amused chuckle, a thin judicial bray trickling from set juridical lips, a sound the likes of which no court stenographer has ever transcribed.

THAT AFTERNOON SHE GOES TO THE MALL AND buys a dress and another dress and a pair of shoes and a hat she doesn't need. She looks at the other shoppers and yearns for a normal life with normal people, a normal husband who works for Southern Pacific or Mitsubishi...or my God, even the Post Office. She wonders what it is like to live in a tract house, to know your neighbors, to hear children in the yard, to struggle side by side to make ends meet.

If only there were someone she could talk to, someone to whom she could confess her dilemma. But no one else—friends, relatives, co-workers—seems to have noticed a thing. No one shares her conclusion or seems in the least bit suspicious. Even the most sympathetic friend, assuming she had one, would look at her askance if she voiced her belief. No one would pretend to take her seriously except for some tabloid reporter hungry for any sensation. And by tabloid standards such

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# ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS

BY ESTHER M. FRIESNER

The funny lady of SF celebrates David Mattingly.

**I**MAY NOT BE AN ARTIST, BUT I'M definitely an Impressionist. No, this does not mean you can come up to me and say, "Do Streisand! Do Streisand!" It just means that certain people make certain impressions on me—sometimes long before we meet—and when that first impression gets borne out by subsequent events, evidence, and good old-fashioned hearsay, it's kind of a thrill, especially when it's a good impression.

My first impression of David B. Mattingly was simple: Here's one of the Good Guys.

Actually, to be totally honest about this, my first impression of him was even simpler, viz.: Wow!

You see, I'd noticed Dave's work long before we had any contact, be it long distance or face to face. How could I not notice it? His book covers were possessed of magical powers, far beyond those of ordinary cover art. They had the ability to confer the power of levitation upon the books they adorned. That is to say, they caused these books to

*LEFT BELOW: Known primarily for his more serious work, Mattingly welcomed the chance to show off his comical side for Esther Friesner's **Harpy High**. RIGHT: For Charles Sheffield's upcoming anthology **How to Save the World**, Mattingly created this cover using advanced computer-generated imagery.*



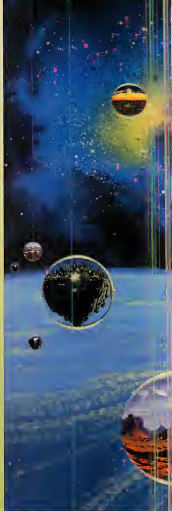




**TOP:** The inspiration for many of Mattingly's paintings comes as he is relaxing, as with *The Kalif's War*. **ABOVE:** With his middle name of "Burroughs," it was inevitable that Mattingly would paint that author's characters as in *Pellucidar*. At the Earth's Core. **RIGHT:** The cover for James Blisch's *Cities in Flight* was done after he worked as an artist on Dick Tracy.

grow wings and fly off the shelves and into the hands of innocent passersby. They could also wreak upon these books the metamorphosis of causing them to grow legs and walk out of the stores with happy buyers.

Now mark you well, all this was in the Dark Ages, namely the years before I had any books of my own published. In those benighted times, I had no idea of how the



whole book/author/publisher/cover artist relationship operated. When I make public speaking appearances, many people ask me, "Do you draw the covers for your own books?" It's an honest question, cousin to "Do you get to pick the covers for your own books?" The answer to both being: Nuh-uh. Nope. No way. I knew this even before my first book sale.

What I didn't know was how little input the author (especially the new author) gets to have concerning cover art. In most cases, what goes on the cover is determined by the joint efforts of the editorial and art departments. The first glimmer the author gets



about what they have in store for his or her work is when (and if) a cover flat is sent.

This is oftentimes the first cue for the author to exclaim, "GAH!" This is also the reason that authors frequently will get together in the dimmer, smokier corners of con parties and stage an Ugly Cover Contest.

When it comes to book covers, ugliness is not measured by aesthetics alone. Cover artists are professionals and art directors do not please their higher-ups in the publishing world by handing out jobs to someone who can't tell one end of a brush from the other. Some covers are ugly because they have nothing to do with the book inside. Some reveal

that the artist, while perhaps a superb draftsman, didn't have the time or the inclination to research costumes or weaponry, leaving behind a cover that is a very pretty Mistake. Some covers are Generic Dragon Cover #4 or Standard Spacescape #7B. And a whole lot of ugly covers are *not* the fault of the artist. No one lets them read the manuscript they're supposed to be illustrating, and as for suggesting they contact the author for a clue—? Some hope!

I have never been a serious contender in the Ugly Cover Contest. I have been lucky. So when I was told that there had been a mid-series change in cover artist for the *Gnome*

*Man's Land*, *Harpy High*, *Unicorn U* trilogy, I recrossed my fingers and hoped against hope that my luck had not run out. I was very pleased with the Warhola cover on *Gnome Man's Land*, and I had no idea whether I'd be as happy with the New Guy. I'd seen Dave's work, but I'd never bothered to learn the name of the artist who was doing such certifiably cool stuff. When they told me "Matingly" I thought of my son's baseball card collection.

And then...contact! I'd be lying if I said I remember whether it came in the form of a letter or a phone call, but it was contact nonetheless. It was Dave, getting in touch with me, the lowly ink-stained wretch, to let



**LEFT:** Mattingly's cover portrait of Doc Sidhe for Aaron Allston's recent novel from *Bloody* is a tribute to James Bama's classic Doc Savage covers, and is one of the artist's personal favorites. **RIGHT:** The cover for Jeffrey Carver's *The Rapture Effect* is a homage to Robert McColl, whom Mattingly calls "the most spiritual of all space artists."

me know that he was very happy to have the chance to do one of my covers because he had long been wanting to illustrate something funny and that he hoped I would be happy with the result.

If I would be happy? This is not a question authors get asked a lot. (This is also why authors gather periodically for mass recitations of Emily Dickinson's classic "I'm Nobody—Who's Your Agent?") And thus it was that Dave became, in my humble opinion, one of the Good Guys.

He's been working on nailing down the title of Grand Champion Good Guy since then. When we finally did meet, I confided in him my shameful, secret desire to someday be part of the cover art for one of my books. Did he laugh? Did he make noncommittal noises? No, he told me to have someone take a lot of



photos of me wearing a cheerleader costume in a variety of rah-rah poses from which he might paint. Result? That's me on the cover of *Unicorn U*. (Those of you who've seen me in person, don't bother raising your eyebrows. Dave not only had the kindness to let me see my modest fantasy fulfilled, he also had the medical genius to give me a full body transplant in the process.)

He's not just a Good Guy, he's a great artist. That's my untrained opinion; you'll find it backed up by any number of experts I've seen his work and I've heard him speak about it at conventions. He doesn't take shortcuts. He's not the sort of person to bandy about Generic



Dragon, Covers or Standard Spacescapes. He's always looking for new ideas, new faces, new ways to stretch his skills and his repertory. He's not content to rest on his laurels (which really isn't a very comfortable thing to do, if you've ever laid eyes on a laurel). He's got a wonderful sense of humor, and the talent to translate both of these into art. He's just as capable of evoking a gasp of awe, a gust of laughter, or a knowing smile.

Now Dave has his own series of trailing curls, depicting some of his finest work. They're gorgeous, with production standards worthy of the art they showcase. On the back

of each one you can see alternate cover art, which provides the viewer with insight into the whole creative process, as well as giving you the excuse to exclaim, "Whoa! Cool!" in a public place. The cardbacks also let you learn lots more about Dave's work, in his own words, than I could ever tell you.

But I can tell you this: Art is something you give to the world. Yes, give; you can make more money swapping sowbely futures or unclogging drainpipes. It can't come from an unskilled hand, but even more important, it can't come from a stingy spirit or a mising heart. Dave has neither—he gives art and praise and credit and kindness. He is married

to a kindred spirit of kindness and giving, his lovely wife Cathleen. If you want to know how lovely she is, you can find her depicted on a number of Dave's covers, including *Unicorn U.*—she's the brunette cheerleader who *didn't* need the full body transplant. At the time of this writing they are possessed and utterly mastered by three cats who figure prominently in their holiday cards but who refuse to pose for cover art.

Your loss, kitties. ▀

To purchase David Mattingly's originals and prints, write to Worlds of Wonder, P.O. Box 814, McLean VA 22101.

# ANOTHER TURING TEST

BY JEFFERY D. KOOISTRA

*Illustration by John Berkey*

On the run from the space police, the man and the machine each fought for their lives and struggled to find the true meaning of friendship.

**H**E WAS ESCAPING WITH three billion credits worth of glow diamonds. The *Delphi* raced for the Hague limit of the Caffin system under high acceleration, executing vector pirouettes at random intervals, keeping the pursuing police craft from locking onto her course.

"How long before we reach the Hague limit, Raleigh?" Lloyd Carstens asked his friend, the ship's computer.

"Depending upon our specific vector changes, between 6.3 and 8.9 minutes, Wait. The police ship has launched an intercept missile, a Banstee XG-4."

"How soon to impact?"

"Twenty-two seconds if evasion fails."

For thirty years they'd crossed the thousand-stars' wide sky, touching on a thousand horizons, only to be off again.

Thirty years ago, Lloyd won forty thousand credits in a card game, his cheating going undiscovered. He bought the *Delphi*, stole ten thousand credits from his father to repair it,







and set off for the stars to be a free merchant. He was a loner, needing no man, indifferent to women; the few who knew him at all invariably described him as "cold." But to his few friends he was fiercely loyal. Over the years he'd turned a profit, paid back his father, and invested in improvements to his ship.

"I think it's time we revealed our surprise," Lloyd said.

"Right," said Raleigh.

Though still under high boost, the Banshee missile gained on them five times faster. The *Delphi's* compensation fields strained to protect Lloyd from the terrible accelerations. The missile homed in, nearing detonation proximity. Suddenly, the starship changed vectors in a turn that should have smeared Lloyd all over the bulkheads through compensation field failure. The missile missed.

Lloyd survived the maneuver. He had made a highly illegal and expensive modification to his ship—he'd added a surge compensator.

"Beautiful, Raleigh! How long can we keep this up?"

"Now that they know, the police will adjust. I can keep dodging, but eventually they'll get us."

"I know that. Just give me our chances."

"We have a 72 percent probability of making it to the Hague limit and escaping without incurring serious damage."

"Good."

The life of the free merchant suited him, but after thirty years Lloyd had found it becoming routine. Then he found riches beyond his dreams. The glow diamonds had lain in the remnants of a dead alien base in Caflin's outer asteroid belt for 400 million years. The race that produced them, long since vanished, had left behind artifacts worth a king's ransom to museums and private collectors.

They were worth even more to others. And Lloyd knew where to find them.

Caflin had laws forbidding the removal of artifacts. Lloyd didn't appreciate those laws. The police caught on when he skipped his pre-departure inspection.

The missile approached again. Lloyd felt a barely discernible twisting in his guts as Raleigh put the ship through another ultrahigh G-turn and the surge compensator activated to protect him.

The missile roared silently past.

"There's a call coming in," Raleigh announced. "The police captain is ordering us to submit to boarding."

"Ignore it."

The *Delphi* continued to twist through its erratic course until Raleigh said, "Twenty seconds to the Hague limit. Twenty-one to hyperdrive."

"Good. HTS-17 here we come." HTS-17 was a black hole with a sparsely filled asteroid belt. On one of those asteroids Lloyd had a bubble home. Over the years he'd found that having a "safe spot" could come in handy.

The ship crossed the invisible boundary of the Hague limit, inside of which a hyperdrive will not work. Raleigh prepared the ship for insertion. For one second he could not use his evasive maneuvers. For one second he was helpless.

The Banshee missile reached its extreme detonation proximity, not close enough to destroy the *Delphi*, but sufficient to cause some damage.

It exploded like a micronova, just as the *Delphi's* hyperdrive acti-

*The glow diamonds had lain in the remnants of a dead alien base in Caflin's outer asteroid belt for 400 million years. The race that produced them, long since vanished, had left behind artifacts worth a king's ransom...*

vated and the ship whipped away in a streak of blue.

Lloyd asked, "How much damage did we take, Raleigh?"

As always, the answer was immediate. "The shields took most of the hit. However, the sublight engines were damaged, and so are all of my long range scanners. The hyperdrive insertion was effected properly, and we are on course for HTS-17. In short, we're flying blind, but we know where we're going. The maintenance mobiles should have the sublights fixed near the time of our arrival at HTS-17, but we'll have to orbit for several days before the scanners can be repaired."

"We've got the time. No one else knows where we're going. What's our ETA?"

"Ten point three one hours to emergence."

"Fine. I'm going to get some sleep. Wake me after breakout."

Raleigh directed his three maintenance mobiles into the damaged areas of the ship and set them to work.

LYOYD AWOKE TO THE CLANG OF ALARM BELLS. "Raleigh, what the hell's the matter?"

"We crossed HTS-17's Hague limit while still in hyperdrive."

"How did that happen?"

"I don't know yet. I should have sufficient data in a few minutes."

Lloyd left his stateroom for the control bubble. Though he could talk to Raleigh from anywhere in the ship, being in the control bubble would at least make him feel like he was doing something.

"How bad is the damage?" Lloyd asked.

"Do you want to know all of it, or just the highlights?"

"Start with the highlights."

"The hyperlight engines disintegrated when we hit the Hague limit and they took the sublight drive, two of my maintenance mobiles, and 80 percent of the aft section with them. All ship's systems are running off auxiliary power."

Lloyd wasn't happy with the news. Eventually he'd have to call for help. Even if he were lucky enough to have that help come in the form of another free merchant, he'd have to give up a huge cut of his glow diamonds. Still, he'd have plenty left over to get his ship repaired.

"Is there any good news?" he asked.

"Yes. The lifeboat is OK."

"Let's hope I don't have to use it."

"You don't have any choice."

Lloyd felt cold. "What do you mean? We've been worse off than this. The ship can last virtually forever even on auxiliary power, and life support seems to be working OK."

"Incorrect. We haven't been this bad off before. When we crossed the Hague limit and dropped into normal space, we wound up in an orbit with an extremely low perihelion."

"And?"

"HTS-17 is a black hole. The tidal stresses will be great enough to tear the *Delphi* apart even before closest approach."

"What can we do about it?"

"I can prepare the lifeboat and you can leave the ship."

"That's not what I meant," Lloyd muttered. Then he asked, "Have you found out why we hit the Hague limit yet?"

"There are a number of possibilities. Most probable is that the

hyperflight chronometers were damaged by the Banshee missile detonation. Since the scanners were also damaged, I couldn't see our approach, and we failed to drop out of hyperspace at the appropriate time."

"What about the backup system?"

"The scanners are the backup system."

"So what do we do now?" Lloyd asked.

"I suggest that you leave in the lifeboat."

Involuntarily, Lloyd's stomach tightened. "Besides that," he said.

"There are no other acceptable options." There was a momentary pause and Lloyd stared into the viewscreen without really looking at it. Finally, Raleigh said, "I'll prepare the lifeboat."

"No!" The word came with anger. On one level Lloyd knew he was being irrational. After all, Raleigh knew the ship better than he, knew what was wrong and what could be fixed. Raleigh could examine all the options and decide on the optimum course of action far faster than Lloyd could. But Lloyd could not give the situation up as hopeless just like that. It went against his grain.

And there was some other feeling he got at the thought of leaving. At first unsure of what it was, he then found he could put a name to it: shame. But why shame? Other words came to mind: Dishonorable, disloyal, cowardly. And why these words?

He saw the answer in a flash.

"Why not?" Raleigh asked.

Lloyd faced Raleigh's control bubble optical sensor. "Because I'd have to leave you behind," he said.

"So what?"

"So you're my friend," Lloyd answered. He heard a scraping sound come from the entryway. Raleigh's remaining maintenance mobile entered and began working on the control console.

Raleigh said, "Irrelevant. You cannot live through the close approach if you stay with the ship."

"I won't leave you," Lloyd said.

"Why?"

"Because you're my friend, damnit! A man can't just leave a friend to die. Not without trying everything else first. We'll save ourselves or we'll die trying. Together."

"I'm a soulless machine," Raleigh said simply.

"Maybe so." Lloyd hesitated while he tried to put together his thoughts. "But you're intelligent. Maybe you're self-aware. That's good enough for me. Besides, who can say you have no soul? If God can put souls into people, He can put them into computers too."

Raleigh didn't answer immediately. The pause was strange to Lloyd, who was used to Raleigh's rapid responses. Finally, Raleigh said, "If you are my friend, then I am your friend." A statement, not a question. "Yes."

"Then you'll understand why I have to do this."

The maintenance mobile left the control console and moved toward Lloyd, its four arms extended, reaching for him. Lloyd backed away.

"What are you doing, Raleigh?"

"Since you are unwilling to save your own life, Lloyd, I will save it for you."

The mobile kept coming. Lloyd scrambled to get away. "I won't just leave you to die! There must be something we can do. You can't do this!"

"There is no escape for me. By your reasoning, you are my friend. I can't let you give up your life for my sake in a situation I know to be hopeless."

Lloyd thought about that for a second. "Touché. But I'm not changing my mind." He beat the mobile to the entryway, raced to his stateroom, and locked himself in, using the manual catch which Raleigh couldn't open. He rummaged through a drawer, found his pulse pistol, and drilled Raleigh's optical pickup for this room with a burst of laser light.

He sat down on his bunk thinking that this was one hell of a way to go down with his ship.

LLOYD MUSED ABOUT THE PAST. ABOUT HIS UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD ON

the mining world of Slag; how he'd learned to fight and gamble, steal and hide; how he'd managed to get the *Delphi* and find freedom among the stars. He remembered discovering that Raleigh was intelligent. Raleigh himself had pointed it out. He recalled the myriad of things they had done together, the planets they'd visited, and trading they'd done: the scrapes and tumbles, the triumphs and glories. Even though Raleigh was a computer, the word that best described their relationship was friendship.

Raleigh spoke to him over the intercom. "Lloyd, this is silly. Please go to the lifeboat."

Lloyd ignored that. He knew Raleigh must be up to something. Raleigh wasn't one to give up. He said, "Raleigh, if the lifeboat is OK, why can't we use its drive unit to alter our orbit to take us farther away from HTS-17?" Lloyd was sure Raleigh would have a logical answer. Raleigh always did.

"That was the first option I examined after the accident. There is insufficient time. We will approach periapeis in 5.21 hours. The lifeboat has fail-safes which prevent it from being used to move a mass more than 1.5 times its own. What is left of the *Delphi* masses more than that. With only one maintenance mobile it would take twenty-six hours to override the fail-safes and get the lifeboat mounted in a suitable configuration."

"What if I helped?"

"That would take longer."

HALF AN HOUR LATER RALEIGH HAD STILL NOT TRIED ANYTHING TO remove Lloyd from the stateroom. But something would happen soon. To kill time, Lloyd tried to think of other strategies to save the ship, though Raleigh almost certainly would have anticipated all of his schemes and rejected them for some reason.

But it was either that or think about dying.

"Raleigh," he said, "I have another idea. Tell me what's wrong with this one. The auxiliary power unit is just a smaller version of the mass converter that powers the ship, right?"

"Yes."

"Isn't there some way to turn it into an old-fashioned reaction engine?"

"Yes. But most of ship's stores were lost along with the hyperdrive. It would take twenty-three days to cannibalize parts of the ship and build a reaction drive." Then Raleigh added: "Please, Lloyd, go to the lifeboat. Lethal proximity is only 4.63 hours away."

Lloyd ignored him.

A NOISE CAME FROM OUTSIDE THE DOOR AND THEN A SPOT ABOVE THE hatch glowed cherry red and lengthened into a line.

"What are you doing, Raleigh?"

"I'm sorry," Raleigh answered. "Time is running out. Since you won't come out, I'm coming in after you. The mobile is using a laser torch to cut out the lock. Why don't you make this easy and just come out?"

Lloyd smiled at that. "At best a mobile is clumsy. How are you going to catch me?"

Raleigh's next statement was a surprise. "You haven't left me much choice. If you try to avoid the mobile, I will use it to burn and damage your legs. Once immobilized, I'll tranquilize you and drag you to the lifeboat. Your legs can heal after you are rescued."

"I have my own laser. Think I can hold off the mobile with it?" Lloyd said defensively.

"No. I took precautions. Please, Lloyd, I don't want to harm you. You are my friend. Go to the lifeboat."

"No, Raleigh. We either survive together or go down fighting together. You, this ship, are all I have. I was nothing before I found you. I have nothing else to go to." The more Lloyd talked, the more confident he was that he was right.

He turned over a table and two chairs and made himself a barricade while he waited for the mobile. It finished cutting away the lock and pushed the door open. Through its eyes Raleigh would now be able to see into Lloyd's room. Lloyd kept his body sheltered behind the barricade, revealing only his eyes and the barrel of his

pulse pistol. With its two right arms, the mobile was holding a shield that looked like it had been cut out of a bulkhead. That's why it had taken Raleigh so long to come for him.

Lloyd fired a pulse, but Raleigh anticipated and protected the mobile with the shield. The mobile advanced, the laser torch in its upper left arm set at maximum. It reached the barricade and started cutting through it. Lloyd immediately put himself behind the section Raleigh was slicing apart. Raleigh stopped.

"If you burn through this barrier, you'll kill me," Lloyd said. "That would kind of defeat your purpose." While speaking, he thoughtlessly placed his left hand over the top of the barricade. Raleigh burned off Lloyd's middle finger.

"Ouch! *Touché*, dammit!" Lloyd got off another shot of his own and managed to break the steel fore tendon of the mobile's upper left arm.

The battle continued awhile, but remained a stalemate. Lloyd kept putting himself behind the places in the barricade where Raleigh would start cutting, and if Lloyd got off another good shot or two, the mobile would be so damaged that Raleigh would be unable to bring Lloyd to the lifeboat at all, incapacitated or not.

Raleigh broke off the attack and removed the mobile from the stateroom. Another approach was needed. Number two on his list required the use of the mobile to manufacture an aerosol anesthetic to release into Lloyd's room. Then Lloyd, unconscious, could be dragged to the lifeboat. Raleigh could not predict the probability of success, however, as he did not have a list of the remaining ship's supplies. He didn't know if he had enough time to concoct an anesthetic. He sent the mobile to take a look.

"**RALEIGH, HUROR ME FOR A MINUTE. HOW DOES A LIFEBOAT SLOW DOWN from high velocities? It doesn't have a very big engine.**"

"A lifeboat uses a momentum sink."

"Ah, now I remember. The lifeboat's kinetic energy is field couple transferred to a one ton lead sphere that then gets ejected at some high percentage of lightspeed."

"You don't need to use the momentum sink. The lifeboat's drive can change your orbit to one with a great enough periastris for you to survive the tidal effects. You will swing around HTS-17 and back out beyond the Hague limit. The hyperwave distress beacon will activate automatically."

Lloyd got the feeling that Raleigh was trying to make a rescue sound unreasonably simple, perhaps to stimulate Lloyd's interest in being saved. But Lloyd wasn't buying it.

"That's not what I asked. What are the G-forces in the lifeboat when the momentum sink is activated?"

"Maximum for a standard lifeboat decelerating from seventy thousand kilometers per second is approximately fourteen million gravities."

"Then how does the occupant survive?"

"Lifeboats use a variant of the surge compensator. It counteracts the deceleration effects for the short duration of deceleration. The compensation fields are very strong, but only unidirectional and short-lived. One use destroys the mechanism."

"OK. Now to my point," Lloyd said. "Is there some way we can use the lifeboat's momentum sink to change the *Delphi* orbit?"

**Lloyd fired a pulse, but Raleigh anticipated and protected the mobile with the shield. The mobile advanced, the laser torch in its upper left arm set at maximum. It reached the barricade...**

This was another of the options that Raleigh had explored but quickly rejected after the *Delphi* had gotten into trouble.

"Yes, but—"

"How long would it take to set up?" Lloyd interrupted.

"One point two hours."

"And how much time is there until perihelion?"

"Three point three hours."

"Then we have enough time!"

"You are forgetting something. The compensation fields are also necessary to protect the lifeboat structure itself from falling under the forces of deceleration. If we used the momentum sink, the compensation effect would necessarily lose efficiency. The experienced G-forces in the optimum case scenario would still be 837 gravities. You would still die."

"Oh."

Raleigh threw in another plan for Lloyd to leave the ship. "Why don't you go to the lifeboat, Lloyd? There's nothing you can do here." He was stalling. With the mobile Raleigh had found the right chemicals to make an obsolete, but still effective, anesthetic.

Again Lloyd ignored him. Instead, he said, "Wait a minute. The surge compensators in the *Delphi* still work, don't they? They weren't lost with the hyperdrive. The actuators are in the front of the ship."

"They are unpowered. They're not hooked into the auxiliary system."

"So what? You could hook them up in ten minutes. What would be the internal G-stresses then?"

"The *Delphi*'s surge compensators are not the same as the system in the lifeboat. G-stresses would still be over 370 gravities. You can't survive that either."

"No, I guess not."

Lloyd was quiet again, and Raleigh hurried to finish the anesthetic. The mobile was on the way back to Lloyd's cabin when Lloyd asked another question. "Raleigh, how long can the *Delphi* survive 370 Gs?"

Raleigh didn't answer.

"Raleigh, how long?"

"Please, Lloyd, leave the ship now."

The *Delphi*, the best private ship in the Capital Products catalog from fifty years ago. Her hull was single molecule chains, braided into spars and beams, and interlaced through the ceramsteel bulkhead material. Built to pound ground, again and again and again.

The *Delphi* could survive 370 gravities forever.

"By using the momentum sink in the lifeboat we could avoid a close orbital approach?" Lloyd asked.

"Yes."

"And the only thing standing in the way of you saving yourself is that it would kill me?"

Raleigh didn't answer. The mobile was fifteen seconds away from Lloyd's door when Lloyd said, "Raleigh, you are my friend?"

"Yes."

"And if you are my friend, then I am your friend?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll understand why I have to do this."

The mobile was in the stateroom and already releasing the anesthetic when Raleigh watched through its eyes as Lloyd put the muzzle of the pulse pistol in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

"*Touché*," Raleigh said. □

## AFTER

Continued from page 46

found it—in the way he lay in bed after waking up to watch Sarah do her exercises and dress, a particular path to a particular domicile, the noontime and sunset ritual of preparing meals, the hour before bedtime spent reading to each other from favorite texts—he set on it like a grill.

Leo learned his way around the camp and did most of the errands. Sarah still had duties with the militia and she went off each day, accompanied by a guard. Leo understood that the guard meant he must keep quiet, but Leo did not want to talk to anyone. Leo kept the domicile and tended the chores. The coolness and suspicion he had noticed in their first couple days back dissipated now. People treated him respectfully, even helped him. He moved through the community quietly, unconsciously making himself a small detail, hardly noticeable, and it seemed that people appreciated the effort. There went Leo Geroncero, one of the Returneds, yes, he's a good Co, he went through so much, look at the way he walks, poor man, they did terrible things to him. Leo listened, smiled a self-deprecating smile, and never talked about his captivity. The more he accepted the role they cast for him, the better he was received, the easier his life became, and he thought perhaps things might not turn out so badly after all.

He avoided the other Returneds. He did not recognize most of them, there must have been other valleys, but it surprised him how quickly he identified them, and they him, and pointedly arranged their daily trajectories so as to never meet. Like so many north magnetic poles they slipped and slid around each other and never came together. Not at first, anyway. There were two or three hundred of them, though, and the camp was close. Leo did not think about what might happen if they began talking among themselves. He had his grill and did not want to let it go.

Occasionally he went into the city itself, to help near the burial pits. Bodies were always being found inside the shattered remains of the buildings. He helped bring them out, helped scrape tissue samples for attempted identification through DNA match, helped by bringing food and water to some of the workers.

He worked late one evening. People went home and soon he discovered that he was alone. He stood at the edge of one of the big pits, staring across it through the lenses of his mask, his mind empty except for a subdued wonder. He walked along the edge, absently kicking rock and dirt in. As twilight deepened the pit seemed less and less forbidding, more like a natural feature, nothing to stir the sadness it did in daylight.

With a start he realized that he had wandered nearly all the way around, to the edge furthest from the city. He looked out across the landscape, to the distant hills. The ground was chopped up, gouged, and Leo

recognized broken and twisted machines. He shivered, then walked out toward the nearest shattered form.

In the dark it was difficult to tell whether it was human or intruder. It did not matter, really; his reaction was still one of fascinated revulsion. A war machine. Ugly, powerful, beautiful, even in this condition it frightened him.

He glanced up at the stars. Night was minutes away. He turned to go back and stopped. A movement caught his eye.

About two hundred meters away, one of the machine-shapes rose up out of the dirt. Leo's heart rammed his ribs, his limbs went cold. He wanted to run, but then thought maybe movement would attract it. He stood in place, motionless, and watched.

The machine was in pieces, though. As he watched, he saw different sections of it float up and seem to hover. The different sections danced around each other, then came together. He heard the clatter of metal and plastic and alloy.

Then he noticed the faint nimbus above the fragments. A hazy oval, like pale St. Elmo's Fire, surrounded the shards. Pieces fell and were retrieved, and the entire collection was reassembled into a new configuration. The pale bubble seemed to play with the lifeless parts, held them together, threw them away, made them dance.

Suddenly it dropped all of it. The oval hung there for a few seconds, then faded out of existence.

Leo ran, stumbling, all the way back to the domicile. He considered reporting it, but decided against it. Say nothing, he thought, and nothing will harm you. Say nothing, like the other Returneds, or say lies. Better, he thought, to say nothing.

HE DID NOT NOTICE EXACTLY WHEN MIGRON came back. Maybe with the spring. One day Leo realized the man had been visiting regularly, though, after a long absence, and the visits grew longer. Other people came and went, weaving a complex web from their domicile, and he recognized what was happening. Sarah—or at least this domicile—had become a focus, and Migron was responsible.

He wanted to stop it, but he stayed in the bedroom when the meetings went on, pointedly refusing to listen in. He went over and over the list of errands to run the following day, replayed the mornings that had gone by and how the mornings to come would not change, anticipated the cycle, the repetition, anticipated the anticipation. He held it all tightly in his mind, but even as he did, details broke away, jumbled, became lost and then found again in a new order. It amazed him how a meeting, a series of meetings, that he never participated in fragmented his life. He was in another room, worrying over a separate world of priorities and desires, and yet words he did not hear changed it all.

Sarah came to bed later and later, then on some nights did not come to bed at all. She

was pensive, sometimes sad, and Leo worked harder to solidify the routine. It was all those others, he thought, ruining everything: not Sarah, not her choice, but *them*, all of them, Migron and Sandower and the Armada and the Intruders—all of them intruders, no distinction now, there was no point in distinction. Anger turned to resentment turned to hatred.

When the first riot broke out—because Armada security arrested members of the militia—the hatred turned to sadness. He held to his grill even after that, but he knew the cup was empty.



**EO OPENED HIS EYES in darkness. For a few seconds he lay still, not knowing**

what had wakened him. Then he heard the voices. The meeting still continued? He pushed himself

up and listened, but he made out no words. Only the emotion was clear in the voices, insistent, earnest emotion, almost desperate.

He found his utilities in the dark and silently slipped into them. Their rigid newness had long since melted to pliant familiarity.

The bedroom door swung open.

"Leo?"

"Yes, Sari?"

"We have to leave."

She moved into the room invisibly, a wisp of gray from the dim light in the living room. She granted and Leo heard something heavy dropped to the floor.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Armada security. They're arresting Returneds."

"What...time is it?" He searched the darkness for the clock.

"Before dawn. Help me."

In the darkness she was adding to the pack. When she finished she hauled out another one and dropped it at his feet.

"Grab that one," she said.

"Where are we going?"

"The forest, the hills. The partisans who haven't surrendered. Come on!"

"But—"

"Leo!"

He picked up the heavy pack and swung it to his shoulders. He stepped out into the living room, then through the front door.

The air was sharp, a cool spring night. Stars punctured the sky. We're trying for the valley wall again, Leo thought. Maybe this time...

A sound brought his gaze down to Co Weilan's domicile. The old man stared out through his screen door at Leo. Once more Leo crossed the avenue. This time Co Weilan did not back away.

"..." Leo began, then closed his mouth. Co Weilan did not move. Leo licked his lips. "We're leaving. The Armada..."

"I heard," Co Weilan said. His voice rasped, gravel on paper. "So?"

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"I wanted to tell you...I wanted to say..."

"What?"

"I'm sorry for your loss."

"Don't be."

"But there was nothing I could do."

Leo, Sarah called.

Leo did not want to look away from Co Weilan. He had never really seen the man before. He could not see him clearly now, in the dark, but he felt the eyes, smelled the old man's odor.

"Choose something," Co Weilan said.

"What?"

"Choose something." He lowered his head briefly. "Go on. You'd better leave."

Leo backed away from Co Weilan, reluctant to turn away. Sarah touched him then and he jerked around. When he looked again, Co Weilan was gone.

"Come on," Sarah said.

Leo looked up at the stars. They were fading, pushed aside by morning. He hurried after Sarah, down the empty dirt street. He glanced back. Co Weilan sat before his domicile now, a rifle in his lap.

They were nearly to the edge of the tent city when Leo heard the faint whine. Sarah stopped, turned, and searched the sky over Panthea. She pointed. Leo looked up and saw the bright glint of sunlight off the hulls of three sleek Armada fliers.

Other people were in the streets now, all carrying packs and weapons and hurrying to the edge of the tent city. Sarah slapped Leo's arm and ran. Leo struggled to keep up with her.

The air crackled sharply behind him. He turned and saw bolts of white energy lance up at the Armada fliers from the vicinity of the hospital tent. The craft veered, split up. The bolts followed. The repeated thunderclaps set Leo's ears ringing.

Then one bolt touched a flier. Leo was unsure he saw it at first, the blow seemed to be close but not close enough. But the flier twisted like an animal, spun in the air, and then plummeted to the ground. Where it struck, somewhere amid the flimsy domiciles, orange and black smoke erupted with a deeper, sickening roar and Leo's belly was suddenly cold.

The other two fliers returned fire. A blaze billowed into the dawn sky.

"Leo!"

Sarah pulled him around. The urgency in her face frightened him. He wanted to hold her, make her feel safe, but he could not do that. He did not himself feel safe.

They ran.

They burst from the perimeter of the city onto the stretch of open field at the foot of the forest-shrouded hills. Leo's breath came raggedly and his lungs labored. He glanced left and right and saw dozens of small groups of people hurrying for the trees. To the north were the ruins of the old city. Fliers buzzed above it like insects. A few were heading their way. Leo tried to judge the distance and estimate who would win this race, but the pain distracted him.

Out of all the things he could hear now—the incessant whine of the fliers, the delicate crackle of fire, the almost nonsound of his feet striking earth below the hollow rhythm of his breath—he was struck by the absence of voices. Within the compass of all these other sounds, Leo moved through a dream-like silence. No one was talking, shouting, or whispering; he heard no weeping. Ahead, the fringe of the forest was alive with people who had already escaped into the trees. They gestured, eagerly beckoning the runners on.

Sarah was well ahead of him. Three years of guerrilla fighting had honed her body into a powerful machine, and he could not hope to keep up. She stopped occasionally to let him catch up, but before he could touch her, she was running again.

**H**EAVY WEAPON FIRE punctuated the drone of other sounds, adding a new rhythm to his stride and breath. It seemed that they waited until he had emptied his lungs before unleashing a sharp, angry barrage. Leo's vision distorted. He wiped at his eyes. It did not help.

Leo heard calls and looked ahead of him. A group of people were anxiously waving at him and shouting to hurry. He glanced back and saw Armada fliers razing the area of the hospital. A group of them broke off the attack and headed for him. For him, personally, Leo Geroncero, at least it seemed that way, and his adrenaline surged and he ran full out, ignoring the pain spearing his torso, digging at his shoulders. He centered his vision on the group waving him in and thought of nothing but reaching them, the trees.

"Leo!"

He glanced right and left to find Sarah. He did not remember losing track of her, but he could not see her. He entered the forest and the group closed around him, taking some of the weight of the pack, his arms, helping him with the burden. It became easier to run and he looked into the denseness of the forest with some hope.

They ran up a slight rise that gave way to a ravine. He wanted to slow down now, look for Sarah.

"Thank you, I—"

He lost his footing and suddenly they all let go of him. He sprawled down the side of the ravine, hands scraping on roots, leaves breaking and dusting his eyes, the rich odor of humus filling his nostrils. The pack supplied more momentum and he slid nearly to the bottom.

He felt himself being lifted, the pack taken from his shoulders.

"I—thank you—" he said.

A fist rammed into his face. He fell. Panicked, Leo looked at them—young people,

faced quickly changing, becoming enraged and red.

"No, Leo."

"We finish what we start!" one yelled.

Leo tried to cover his head, draw his legs up. But four of them forced his limbs apart and pulled him spread-eagle. Two others stood on either side of him and began to kick him.

The air ripped hotly above them, seared momentarily white by the bolt of energy.

They dropped him. The whole assault had taken less than a minute. He lay still, listening to the heavy pounding of scurrying feet. Twice more the air sizzled. Leo turned his face, raised a hand to cover his eyes.

One of them lay near his head. Smoke wafted from his stomach and Leo saw peeled back burnt fabric. He was so young, his face smooth, now slick with sweat. He turned and saw Leo. "Collaborator," he breathed. "Traitor..." Then he started taking breath in deep, fast gulps.

Leo's body began to shake. He rolled onto his hands and knees and crawled over the wounded man. Straddling him, Leo placed his hands on either side of the youth's face. The skin was dark, like an old cellar. It might have been stone but for the bellows of his mouth and faint quivering. Leo leaned close to his face and waited until the frantic eyes focused on him.

"Listen!" Leo hissed. "I didn't collaborate! Do you understand? I did not collaborate! Not with the Intruders, not with the Arnada! But, my god, I would have if only they had asked! Do you hear? I would have! Anything to get back my home! Anything! But they never asked! Do you hear?"

Leo stared, terrified at his own rage, until the chest between his legs stopped its convulsions.

Leo leaned back and stared up at the canopy of trees and for a time imagined that he was still back in the valley with the other prisoners. The light shifted through the leaves, the branches, and Leo blinked hard to clear his eyes. He could not seem to focus for a few seconds.

The trees moved. He noticed then that branches seemed disconnected, broken, yet hung in the air. Then he saw the faint outline. A huge form hovered in the midst of the boughs, perhaps eight or nine meters overhead. It moved, like thick air, distorting the light, breaking up the perspective, like a giant lens. It drifted sideways a few meters, brushed against limbs, and then receded. A few seconds later and the trees were clear, the air normal. He fell sideways and rolled onto his back. The air had a similar cool texture, the foliage the same delicacy of sunlight through late autumn colors. Maybe this was all still part of the war, a trick played on him by his captors. Yes, he thought eagerly, I've never been released, it's all a dream, a vicious game...

"Leo!"

Sarah's face appeared above him, framed by beautiful leaves and morning light. She examined him quickly, efficiently, her hands

light and kind over his injuries. He heard her rummage in a pack and felt the stab of a hypodermic in his arm.

Quickly a cool painlessness suffused his body, like grace, and he managed to get to his feet. He saw others at the top of the small depression, rifles pointed outward, watching. Another man picked up Leo's pack.

"Come on," Sarah said.

Leo stumbled along with them, over the rise, and off through the woods. The sounds of fighting fell behind them as they distanced themselves from Panthea. One step after the other, again and again, a new routine, though he felt vague throbbing through the drug and knew he would pay later.

**N**IGHT CURNED them where they huddled around the small fire. The risk of detection from the flame was outweighed by the need for warmth in the open country. Leo slept a few hours and woke to find Sarah and the other man nodding off. Sarah smiled wanly at him when he opened his eyes.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Better," he said, sitting up. He ached, but only from bruises. "You need sleep."

She shook her head but he reached out and took the rifle. "Sleep," he said.

Sarah lay back and in seconds her breathing deepened.

Leo stared past the fire into the blackness and listened. The world was empty. There was nothing beyond this small clearing. Everything important was within the circle of flickering light—Sarah and a friend he did not know. Home.

He could not see the giant lens now, not in the dark around the fire. Earlier he thought he had spotted it, hovering nearby, covering their escape in a way.

He thought he understood now. The intruders in their machines—they were not the only ones, and the humans in their colonies were not the only other party in the struggle. He still did not understand why these others—not the intruders, but the ones that had placed the humans in the valley, kept them fed and warm and safe—had not simply rescued all the colonists. Perhaps he never would know. But they had sent them home again when it seemed safe enough. Now they were only watching.

He nestled the rifle in his lap and smiled. In the morning he would go back to find Co Weilan. Sarah would argue with him, certainly, but he would explain that it was his choice, what he needed to do. He would not lose anything. There was nothing he could lose anymore. Leo had found everything and it would go with him, always. Three years gone and only his home remained. □

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the late sixties. Beverly—her confusing loyalty to Spider, her conflicts regarding pregnancy and abortion, her differences with her father—becomes a fully fleshed character. Lee, however, remains an amalgam stereotype of every male hippie who ever donned a headband: long-haired, guitar-playing, radical, dope-smoking and dealing, oversexed. Although marijuana is mentioned frequently, only a few joints are actually smoked. LSD is mentioned only in passing, almost as a footnote. The link between drugs, the states of consciousness they produced, their effect on shaping the culture of the era, is never explored. Unlike the war scenes, the daily reality of life in the counterculture or the protest movement is never depicted in detail. Haldeman does draw an implicit parallel between the violence in Vietnam and the violence at home. Lee and Beverly take part in the demonstrations at the Democratic Convention and are both injured in the subsequent rioting. Yet once again, the drama seems to be underplayed. Compare Haldeman's effective though condensed three-page

narrative of these events to George R.R. Martin's protracted and more emotive depiction of the same events in *The Armageddon Rag*.

None of the counterculture or background material in the book reads poorly, all of it contributes to the plot and/or milieu of the novel, and Haldeman's wit and style continue to carry us along, but the domestic experience of 1968, the year, does not come alive for the reader with the same intensity as the Vietnam experience, nor does Haldeman provide equivalent insights into that experience. As a result, 1968 does not emerge as a definitive novel of the sixties, though it does stand as a significant document of the period, and as a moving statement on the Vietnam War.

Although Spider is an avid SF reader, and a number of SF novels and writers are mentioned in 1968, as Haldeman states in his afterword, this is not science fiction. No matter. If you like Haldeman's other work, if you like a provocative and entertaining read, 1968, the novel, will be one of the better books you'll encounter in 1986, the year.

Brace Boston

## RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

■ Frequent convention goers have learned

that, as with Merrill Lynch, when Fred Lerner speaks, people listen. His comments as a panelist or thoughts from the audience are always erudite and to the point, and evidence both a knowledge and love of SF. Those who have not had the chance to meet in person this founding member of the Science Fiction Research Association can meet him on paper in the pages of *A Bookman's Fantasy: How Science Fiction Became Respectable* (NESFA Press, trade paperback, 102 pp., \$11.95), which collects twenty-four of Lerner's essays, gathered from such diverse places as *Niokus*, *Voice of Youth Advocates* and *Special Libraries*. Assembled to commemorate Lerner's appearance as a Special Guest at Boskone '85, one of the Northeast's premier SF conventions, the collection is split into four sections by topic, each with a new introduction. Lerner's attempts to define science fiction, his anecdote on how Lester del Rey was involved in Lerner's doctoral dissertation defense, and his dissection of Robert Heinlein will be of interest to all. Though in these pages Lerner has written that, "The attempt to arrive at a perfect definition of science fiction is doomed to failure," his struggles to do so are fascinating to watch. □

## FUTURE DYNASTIES, STAR WARS, AND CLAREMONT'S RETURN!

**J**OHN JAKES, HAVING CONQUERED THE worlds of novels and television with his historical sagas *The Kent Family Chronicles* and *North and South*, has now turned to new territory, the SF comic book series. John Jakes' *Mullion Empire* (Telno-Comix) is centered around a corporate family dynasty 500 years in the future. "Tying science fiction to family saga is really—to use the trite phrase—going back to roots," says Jakes. "I grew up reading science fiction. My first fiction sale forty-four years ago was a science fiction short story." Jakes wrote dozens of SF novels in the late '60s, and then got sidetracked, but now he's firmly back. As the story begins, a historian begins searching the Mullion genealogy as part of the 500th anniversary



The Sovereign Seven are superpowered refugees surviving in a new world.

writer Louise Simonson, penciller June Brigman and inker Roy Richardson. Set several months after the destruction of the Death Star, this adventure sends an Imperial pilot as a spy to the planet M'Thail to seek out rebel influence. Little does he know that he will soon come face to face with the most famous rebel of them all, Princess Leia Organa, who finds herself trapped behind enemy lines. This is the first story to show the *Star Wars* universe through the enemy's eyes.

Chris Claremont, who was responsible for transforming the slumbering *X-men* into Marvel's SF megahit, took a brief rest from comics during which he focused on novels. Now back to his first love, Claremont jumps companies to present us with a new twist on SFnal superheroes—*Sovereign Seven* (DC Comics). The story focuses on superpowered refugees from a reality-shattering cataclysm who are forced to survive on a dangerous alien world filled with strange creatures—our world. "What I'm really after," says Claremont, "is the sense of wonder that necessarily follows—or better yet, should follow—from any encounter with the extraordinary. But because these story elements—gods and demigods, heroes and titans—are second nature to those of us who read and write comics, we tend to take them for granted, and thus make no substantial attempt to reinvigorate them. Hopefully, *Sovereign* will change that." First issue's foe: Darkseid.

## COMICS

celebrations...but there are some who do not want that story told. Writer Kate Worley, artist John Warkiss, and colorist John Higgins flesh out Jakes' future fantasy.

When the twenty-first century rolls around, and we finally make contact with alien beings, it would be nice to think that they will value us for our much-wanted arts and sciences. Not according to Eric Vincent and Anthony F. Smith, respectively artist and writer of *Alien Fire: Pass in Thunder* (Kitchen Sink). When a devastated Earth turns to interstellar trade as its only means of survival, the cultural treasures it finds

valued by the aliens aren't Rembrandts, but rather old Buicks and wind-up toys, transformed by tomorrow into objects worth dying for. This mix of new and reprint stories set in a world where dinosaurs have been reborn reintroduces this critically acclaimed series to a new audience. Lewis Shiner, award-winning SF novelist and author of *Deserted Cities of the Heart*, provides an insightful introduction.

*Star Wars* fever is on the rise, as all the world awaits the rerelease of the refurbished first installment in the series, as well as the new films that will tell us of the young Darth Vader and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Until then, the best thing you can do to satisfy your cosmic hunger is pick up the first issue of the limited miniseries *Star Wars: Rites of Chaos*, which brings together the talents of



STRANGERS IN  
A STRANGE LAND...



# SOVEREIGN SEVEN

CHRIS CLAREMONT, DWAYNE TURNER

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## Climb aboard an *Iron Dragon* for a railroad journey to adventure.



Elves, Catmen, and Humans populate a perilous fantasy landscape. Art by Larry Elmore.

THE FIRST TIME I SAW ONE OF THE *EMPIRE Builder* series of railroading board games was a decade ago, at a Champaign, a relaxed SF convention in downstate Illinois. The hotel, though small, had an atrium, so fans could spy on what other fans were doing in the public areas of lower floors. That weekend, I saw a bunch of T-shirted guys hunched over a laminated map of the United States. "They're drawing on a map. With crayons," I remarked to my companion. "Cool," he said, and we raced each other downstairs to see what this was all about. Back home in Chicago we bought our own copy, and thanked Champaign for the introduction to it.

So, for me, this series of games—which later adapted Great Britain, Europe, the whole of North America, Australia, and Japan—has always felt science-fictional. A certain amount of anachronism (railroads were not developed in Japan after such commodities as cars and electronics) doesn't really justify that association, though, and it isn't until now, with *Iron Dragon* (Mayfair Games, ISBN 0-923763-00-2, \$30), that Mayfair's game developers have thrust the basic design of an *Empire Builder* sequel solidly into the realm of the fantastic.

Boardheads (a charming term a friend's baffled girlfriend used after watching us play *Eurotrains* for hours on end) may already be familiar with *Empire Builder* et al.'s basic gameplay, which, for anyone who likes a goal-oriented game, is elegant and deeply satisfying. *Iron Dragon* is designed around the same principles:

A simplified map of a country or continent is presented

on laminated paper or cardboard. The map is set up on a hexagonal grid of dots. Some of the dots are cities, and a few major cities are drawn as seven-dot hexagons.

Each city pays money for trade commodities to any player who has a Demand Card for that commodity, and can carry it on her train (represented by her playing piece, a plastic pawn) to the milepost dot that represents that city. Trains can only move on track (in some games, they can be shuttled briefly by ferry), which is where the crayons come into it: The player each turn may draw such track as she can afford, a segment at a time, from dot to dot across the map.

It costs more to connect across some terrain (mountains, alpine mountains, sand, rivers) than others, and only one player may connect any two dots. (The player who first threads her track through the flattest direct route through a mountain range will spend a lot less money than a player who has to connect mostly mountainous mileposts, parallel to hers.)

Commodities are free for the taking, if the player has room on her train, when she passes through a city that offers that commodity. If she has a Demand Card with another city's request for that commodity, she delivers it by landing on the target city. Payment is a little less than it costs to build the cheapest direct track between the consumer city and the nearest city that supplies the trade item: You make your stash by building track you can reuse, which goes to as many useful cities as efficiently as possible.

The victory conditions are nicely straightforward. You accumulate a certain amount of cash in hand (always 250 of whatever monetary unit the game affects—"gold pieces" in *Iron Dragon*), while also connecting, with your track, all or most of the major cities (in this case, five out of six).

Players always have three Demand Cards, each of which offers three different possible deliveries of commodities for cash; at every delivery, players discard the Demand Cards they've exercised and draw a new one to replace it. Some of the cards in the Demand deck—Event Cards—offer disasters instead: all the bridges wash out over certain rivers, for example, or trains near some cities can "derail," losing a turn and one load of a commodity. There are other rules and restrictions that long-time players quickly internalize: All but the largest cities can be built to by only two or three players, so that the fourth player can't get in, except on someone else's track. (To use someone else's track you have to pay your opponent money, a calculated risk in a game in which investment capital is of critical importance.)

A lot of the fun of these games is in watching history replay itself on the gameboard. In *Empire Builder* or *North American Rails*, a player may say, "Well, with these cards, it looks like I should start out by building the Union Pacific line," and green crayon is soon snaking out a line roughly equivalent to where someone once built real railroads, prompted by similar, simulated algorithms of demand and geography. San Francisco has earthquakes.

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Japan has volcanoes (and earthquakes).

But *Iron Dragon* isn't rooted to our planet. It's set instead on the map of a Middle-Eastish continent called "the world of the Iron Dragons." Divorced from history—not to mention real-life physics—*Iron Dragon* allows the design team to throw in every complication and gameplay variant they can think of.

And, goodness, they sure did. First, there's the Foremen deck. To build track, now, a player has to hold one of the Foremen cards. Foremen are of various races (Human, Dwarf, Elf, Orc, Troll, Catman, Wee Folk) and each has a special skill that makes life easier for the player "employing" that foreman. Foremen can be replaced, later in the game, for a fee, when the player wants to take advantage of some different special ability. Employers of dwarf, for example, pay no extra for track on mountain mileposts. Humans build bridges at no added expense. Wee Folk allow for an extra choice of ships—Oh, there are ships in *Iron Dragon*. Surrounding the map on three sides is ocean which in this game, is gridded out with hex dots, too, and a player who has built her track out to a port milepost may stop there and hire a ship, which will take her into any other port (into which she's built track), at varying speeds. This allows a player to go to parts of the map she hasn't built track across to, but... Caution: Remember that you will need track by the end of the game to meet the victory conditions.

And then there are two cities, across the water from each other, that are connected by a magical teleportation bridge. Players don't need to pay extra to connect the one city, once they've already connected the other, to the rest of their track. Two other cities will magically connect if a special Event Card is drawn (annoying the heck out of players who've already doggedly paid their money to connect those two cities with track. But a game rarely goes through the whole Demand/Event deck, and the card that makes that connection may never come up). The designers have also made train upgrades more flexible than in Mayfair's earlier rail games.

*Iron Dragon* is a change of pace, but its over-complication and multiplicity of play options may lead some people to play it less often than its fellows. I enjoy two-player games with my favorite gaming partner, where having only one ideal route from point A to point B adds zing to the play. Nippon Rails is good for that, a game that's crowded with only three players. *Iron Dragon*'s is a big game, and depending on which foreman you hold, there are many good ways to build across it. It's more satisfying with four players than two, and should even be playable by six (but in that case, take seriously the manufacturer's estimated play-time of four hours!).

It's just about as much fun as the other Mayfair rail games, and a diversion after its more classic siblings. I recommend you start with one of the Earthbound versions, to get the hang of basic play, before you try this one.

Then, *Iron Dragon* may serve as a version that boardheads can use to drag their fantasy-game friends to the same table—and that can't be bad.

### RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

■ After a decade of ruling the roleplaying roost, PASA's *BattleTech* universe has been expanded. Now the dice have been replaced



by a joystick, as *BattleTech* leaps to your Sega Genesis machine (soon to be followed by a Super Nintendo version). In the brutal and violent thirty-first century, the galaxy is wracked by a devastating war fought with monstrous 75-ton BattleMechs armed with the most ruinous weapon that tomorrow's science can create. You must play a Mech-Warrior who pilots the "MadCat" Heavy OmniMech on missions against enemy installations. You can use nine different futuristic weapons systems in your attempts to obliterate enemy resistance and break through the defenses of five different planets. The game features a special two-player cooperative mode to let one player steer while another operates the MadCat's weaponry. The Videogame Ratings Council has rated *BattleTech* as GA: Appropriate for all audiences. Follow along with *BattleTech* as it conquers yet another gaming world.

■ Next time you feel the urge to visit the planetarium, drive to your local software store instead. That's where you'll be able to find a series of newly released CD-ROMs that capture the heavens and put them into your personal computer.

Virtual Reality Laboratories, Inc. has put out three software packages so intense that even Arthur C. Clarke has said "I'm totally awed by what you have done!" *Distans Suns*, *Mars Explorer*, and *Venus Explorer* proclaim on their boxes, "Your spaceship awaits!" and from their encyclopedic contents, the bonst is only slightly exaggerated. *Distans Suns* can realistically display the night sky from anywhere on Earth from 4,713 BC to 10,000 AD, and contains over 1,500 space images as well as the complete Hubble Guide Star Catalog of 16 million stars. *Mars Explorer* and *Venus Explorer* each contain low- to high-resolution images of the surfaces of their respective planets. Until NASA starts selling tickets, this is the only way to hitch a ride into space. □

## ESSAY

Continued from page 36

ners. When it was over everyone vanished. The Burroughs people, all of them straighter than Tarzan's arrows, went to bed. We remembered that Doc Smith had mentioned parties, so we began wandering down the empty, foreboding corridors of the hotel, wondering how to find them.

We walked all the way down one floor, took the stairs up a flight, and repeated the procedure. We were about to quit when a door opened, and two bearded men with thick glasses spotted our name badges and asked if we'd like to come in and join them.

Turns out they were standing in the doorway to a huge suite, and that their names were del Rey and de Camp. Inside, wearing a bow tie and looking not unlike an enormous penguin in his black suit, was Isaac Asimov. Randy Garrett was dressed in something all-satin and not of this century. Bob Silverberg looked young and incredibly dapper. Sam Moskowitz was speaking to Ed Hamilton, and Leigh Brackett in a corner.

*And every last one of them went out of their way to talk to us and make us feel at home.*

Later, another young fan wandered in. Much younger than me. After all, I was 21; Jack Chalker was only 19. We sat around and discussed various things, and then something strange happened, something totally alien to my experience.

Someone asked us what we wanted to do with our lives. (No, that's not the strange part; people were always asking that.)

We each answered that we wanted to write science fiction. And you know what? For the first time in my life, *nobody laughed*.

That's when I knew I was going to come back to Worldcons for the rest of my life.

So Guy Gavriel Kay reads off the list of nominees, and then he opens the envelope, and the winner is Connie Willis, and I am second to her again for the eighty-third time (yeah, I know, I've only lost maybe seventy-five Hugos to her, but it feels like eighty-three), and everyone tells me I've won a moral victory because I have beat all the short stories and Connie's winner is a novelette that Hugo Administrator David Bratman, in his infinite wisdom, declared to be a Short Story for the Night of September 4 Only.

I find myself wishing that I didn't like Connie so much so that I could hate her just a little on Labor Day weekends, and then I am at the Hugo Losers Party, and suddenly it doesn't matter that I've lost a Hugo, because it is now thirty-one years since that first Worldcon I went to, and it is my annual family reunion, and I am visiting with friends that I see once or twice or, in good years, three times per year, and we have a sense of continuity and community that goes back for almost two-thirds of my life. Hugos are very nice, and I am proud of the ones I've won, and I am even proud of the ones I've lost, but

when all is said and done, they are objects and my friends are people, and people are what life is all about.

And I find, to my surprise, that almost everyone I am talking to, almost all the old friends I am hugging and already planning to see again at the next Worldcon, are fans. Some, like me, write for a living, a few part; most do other things. But we share a common fanish history and a common fanish language, and common fanish interests.

Then I'm sitting in the airport, waiting to board the plane from Winnipeg to Minnesota. There are maybe three mundanes on the flight; everyone else is coming from Worldcon. Larry Niven's there, and Connie Willis, and maybe a dozen other pros, and one of the topics of conversation as we await the plane is whose names will make the cover of *Locus* if the plane crashes, and whose names will be in small print on page 37. Then the topic turns to who you would rescue if the plane crashed: Connie and Larry and me, because you wanted more of our stories, or Beth Meacham and me, because you wanted us to be so grateful to you that we'd buy your next twenty stories. (That goes to show you the advantages of being able to do more than one thing well.)

Now, in any other group, that would be a hell of a morbid discussion, but because they are fans, and almost by definition bright and witty, it is the most delightful conversation I've heard all weekend, and once again I find myself wondering what my life would have been like if Ace had not forwarded that letter to Cas thirty-two years ago.

And then I think back to another convention, the 1967 Worldcon. I was still very young, and too cynical by half, and when Lester del Rey got up to give his Guest of Honor speech, he looked out at the tables—every Worldcon until 1976 presented the GOH speech and the Hugo Awards at a banquet—and said, "Every person in the world that I care for is here tonight."

And I thought: what a feeble thing to say. What a narrow, narrow life this man has lived. What a tiny circle of friends he has.

Well, I've sold seventy-two books of science fiction—novels, collections, anthologies—and I've won some awards, and I've paid some dues, and I don't think it's totally unrealistic to assume that sometime before I die, I will be the Guest of Honor at a Worldcon.

I've done a lot with my life (all with Carol's help, to be sure). I've taken several trips to Africa. I've bred twenty-seven champion colts. I've owned and run the second-biggest boarding kennel in the country. I've sired a daughter that any father would be proud to call his own. I've been a lot of places, done a lot of things. I don't think I've led a narrow life at all.

But when I get up to make my Guest of Honor speech, I'll look around the room just the way Lester did, and, because I'm a reasonably honest man, I won't say what he said.

But I will say, "With three or four exceptions, every person in the world that I care for is here tonight." □

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## SIMULACRUM'S WIFE

Continued from page 81

a minor sensation—HUSBAND OF TWELVE  
YEARS REPLACED BY DOUBLE!—would claim  
only a few column inches on a back  
page.

Give her a sympathetic ear, an eager audi-  
ence, a tabloid ready to set banner headlines,  
and still she would have to seal her lips. Be-  
yond what she knows she also knows that  
if she reveals what she knows...that some-  
day, somehow, somewhere, they will find her.  
No plane, train or automobile can carry her  
fast enough or far enough so that she is  
beyond their acronymic reach—alphabet  
soup is everywhere!—and if they have done  
it once they can do it again. She too can be  
replaced with an imitation of herself.

As she sits awake, staring into the dark-  
ness, the entire merciless scenario jack-  
circuits her mind again and again. Once they  
catch her they will spirit her away in the dead  
of night in some bulky military transport: des-  
tination unknown. They will lock her under-  
ground in a windowless room in the vault of  
some anonymous security installation iso-  
lated in the heart of an unnamed desert. They  
will grill her endlessly, alternating faces in  
rotating shifts, on just how she has detected  
their clever ruse. What will she tell them? That  
the differences are indefinable, some-  
thing only a wife would notice. They will  
never believe her. And even if they do, it will  
not matter.

If they did it once they can do it again, they  
can do it a hundred times and more. She will  
remain a prisoner or worse, while outside her  
life will appear to go on unchanged. Her iden-  
tity will be subsumed by an image of herself.  
An image of herself confronting an image of  
George. Each one perhaps wondering who  
the other really is.

**S**O DAY UPON DAY SHE MUST MAINTAIN  
the charade of their lives. The rou-  
tine they have established over the  
years. The circling round of break-  
fasts and dinners and cheerless evenings. The  
housework she must do herself because  
although they can afford outside help, ser-  
vants have ears! The conversations they have  
had so often, the views they have exchanged  
so many times, the stale running in-jokes that  
bring an automatic smile to each other's lips.  
They might as well remain mute...and often  
they do.

And to avoid arousing his suspicions, she  
must on occasion succumb to his sexual  
demands, thankfully meager. Always she  
takes the proper precautions. Even though  
the ticking of her biological clock groans  
louder by the minute, in the deepest hour of  
night drowning out his snores, this is a sub-  
ject she will never broach. How could she  
even consider having a child by a total  
stranger?

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Frantically pawing through the phone book, tearing the thin pages in her haste, she finds Dr. Spoler's number. It takes three calls before she can plead and cajole an emergency appointment from an indifferent receptionist who has heard it all before. "If you're willing to come at three, and you can wait, we just might be able to squeeze you in."

That afternoon it all comes spilling out of her. Wadding and shredding one tear-stained tissue after another in her lap, she runs on with breathless abandon for nearly the full half-hour she has been granted. Spoler probably thinks she's crazy, completely round the bend, but she doesn't care. At last the words have been spoken and they will not go beyond this room—doctor-patient confidentiality—and now that she has actually spoken them, she feels an immense relief. Now that she's heard it all out loud herself, she begins to realize how crazy it does sound. Even her own voice sounds a bit crazy, not like her normal voice at all. The problem isn't with George, it's clearly with her. It has to be. An over-active imagination. Some chemical imbalance in the brain easily remedied with a daily prescription. Or perhaps merely diet and exercise. Perhaps a trip to the East to visit her family, to get a new perspective on things.

When she looks up, Dr. Spoler is staring at her. His salt and pepper hair is trimmed close to the skull and sharply receding. He wears contacts rather than thick lenses. His eyes are blue rather than brown. Yet there is no mistaking that same implacable and unwavering gaze she has seen directed at her so often in the last few months. She remembers the original referral to Dr. Spoler had come through George, no doubt by way of alphabet soup.

The doctor picks up the telephone. He punches out a number on the pad, the full seven digits, a number too secret to be lodged in digital memory, where it might be accessed by any stranger.

"Lancer?" he says. It is her husband's number at work, a number she has never been allowed to use. "Yes... Spoler here. I'm with her now. You'd better come over here right away and bring Security. I'm afraid we have a problem."

Dr. Spoler puts down the phone. He will not look at her again. Together, in a silence so deafening it blots out the world, so absolute it could encompass a lifetime, they begin to wait. It will not be for long. □

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## GRAIN OF TRUTH

Continued from page 79

last dance.

Ella disappeared just before we left. Mother didn't bother to look for her. We'd all despaired of convincing her to come with us. It was her loss.

That night the palace blazed with candles. I danced most of the night with Charles de Lenne. I imagined what it would be like to be his wife but knew my family connections would never allow him to ask me.

Just after the clock struck twelve, the beautiful girl entered the room. This time she wore a silver dress sewn with diamonds that sparkled like stars in the night. The prince stayed by her, took her arm and wouldn't let go. He was in love with her; anyone could see that.

The chimes began to sound three in the morning when the girl started to leave. The prince wouldn't let go of her arm. She struggled, twisted, and finally pulled free of his grasp, then she ran from the ballroom with the frantic prince in pursuit. Guards scrambled to close doors, block stairs, and seal gates, but the girl eluded them. This time she left something behind: a glass slipper.

The next part of the official history is mostly true. The prince went from house to house trying the slipper on every young girl in the kingdom. When he came to our house, Ella was with the sheep in the pasture by the woods. Mother sent me to find Ella although we knew she hadn't attended the ball. Mother was always fair.

Just as the prince was leaving, I arrived with a miffed Ella in tow. She demanded to try on the slipper. To our surprise, it fit. Ella was the mysterious girl! The prince was overjoyed. He took her back to the castle, and they were married a week later. Mother genuinely hoped Ella had finally found what she'd always wanted. Genieve was a bit jealous. I was simply glad for some peace in our house.

Less than a month after that, the king died suddenly. Malcolm was crowned king, and Ella was crowned queen. That's when the lies and rumors began. Mother was accused of hiring men to kill Ella's father. No noble would believe Mother was innocent when the queen swore it was true. Mother was convicted and beheaded.

Since Genieve and I were still young, we were brought to the castle. Ella made a great show of concern for "her dear sisters." She even discussed the possibility of a marriage between me and Charles de Lenne. He was kind and pleasant, and we became dear friends. I was happier than I'd been since Father died. I'd hoped that living at court my sister and I would be safe. I should've known better.

Late one fall afternoon a servant brought me word that Genieve had been playing on the battlements and had fallen to her death

on the rocky ground below. I knew Ella or one of her lackeys had pushed my little sister; she was afraid of heights. I also knew I was next.

That night, I stole from my room and crept through dark corridors until I reached the lowest outer wall. Mouse-quiet, I climbed down a knotted-sheet rope and ran as fast as I could back to my house. No sooner had I arrived than I heard horses galloping toward me. Ella had discovered I'd escaped.

I fled toward the woods, hoping I could lose them in the quarter-moon dark. Faster and faster I ran along a narrow path. I glanced over my shoulder. Torches flickered between the bare limbs. They were gaining on me. I crashed through briars and branches, scratching my hands and face. I was cold but sweating, breathing ragged mist. They were going to catch me, I knew it.

I almost crashed into a wattle-and-daub hut I hadn't seen in the dark. I dove under the animal-hide curtain hanging over the low doorway. Inside a ratty-haired crone shrieked and threw a wooden bowl at me.

"Please, I won't hurt you!" I said as I crouched behind the only chair in the place. "Soldiers—they're coming for me."

She glared at me. "Why?"  
Quickly, I told her about Ella, my mother, and Genieve, and how I was certain I was the next to die.

The crone cackled. "Right you be, right you be. Ella girl wants you dead, dead, dead. Helped her I did and she promised, oh, she promised. A girl child, pretty little thing, for me to raise. Yes, for me. And now I'll catch you for soldiers. Ella girl will be pleased, yes, pleased."

She lunged for me, but I ran from her hut and headed for the woods but got tangled in some briars. I heard the horses pounding closer, closer.

"She be close, she be!" the crone said. "Look for her, she can't be far!"

I heard a hard crack of palm on jaw. "Shut up, witch. My queen sends me to send you to hell."

A scream filled with rage and betrayal pierced the night, clawing at my soul. The soldiers turned their horses and trotted back toward the castle. They weren't after me. I untangled my cloak from the briars and crept back to the hut. The old woman lay on the ground in front of the doorway, a dark, damp circle spreading across the front of her threadbare shift. Another death by Ella's word.

The crone moved. She wasn't dead! I almost left her, knowing she had tried to betray me into Ella's hands, but I couldn't. I picked up the gaunt body and carried her inside to her heap-of-rags bed. I packed the cleanest rag I could find into the gash in her belly and tried to stop the bleeding.

Clawlike fingers clutched my wrist. The crone opened her dark eyes and stared at me. "Ella girl wants me dead, and dead I'll be, but not so easy she breaks her bargain. Dresses I



give her, shoes and carriage, magics to hide who she is, poison no one can tell. And she gives me death." She gasped, shuddered, and clutched my wrist tighter. "Black bottle, tiny, by the crow's claw...take it, pour in wine...make her drink...make her tell truth...make her tell truth...forever..." Her life wheezed out with her last word.

I found the vial and hid it next to my heart. Where was I to go? I had no family or friends except Charles de Lenne, and I didn't want to endanger him. I decided to leave the kingdom and hoped I could survive on my own.

I tried to avoid roads and people, but a border patrol cornered me in a small rift. They dragged me back to the castle where I was tried for Genieve's murder and treason. Servants and courtiers testified they'd seen me arguing with Genieve and had threatened her. Only Charles stood beside me throughout the trial, my one true friend, even though I begged him not to endanger himself. The way Queen Ella glared at him, I feared he would be the next one to face her wrath. I wasn't surprised when I was convicted, nor was anyone else except Charles. I laughed when King Malcolm sentenced me to death, but it was bitter laughter.

The night before I was to be executed, Charles was allowed to visit me for the first time since my arrest, a final kindness for the condemned. A good man, a true noble, he wanted to try to rescue me and flee the country. I wished...I wished...

"No," I said, "you would die alongside of me, and I thank you for your bravery. But there is a thing you can do for me." I gave him the vial and told him what to do with it.

He looked wary, and for a moment doubt flickered across his face.

I touched his hand. "It isn't poison, nor is it harmful." I poured a cup of wine, added a bit of the dust from the vial, and drank. "See, it will do her no harm...only...only...make her tell the truth...for the rest of her life."

Charles took the vial and put it inside his shirt, then took my hand. Hope sparkled in his eyes. "My lady, I swear by heaven and on my honor, I will do as you ask."

And for the first and last time, he kissed me.

IT IS DAWN. I HEAR THE SOFT TREAD OF MY CONFESSOR accompanied by the heavy boots of the palace guards. I make a good confession and receive absolution, then the guards take me from my cell to the courtyard. I'm not afraid.

Charles is in the crowd, trying to get close enough to touch me. "I've kept my vow, my lady," he calls.

My fingertips brush his. "I love you," I say. I can't stop the words.

"Camille!" He tries to break through the barrier of soldiers, but they are too strong.

I climb the steps and forgive the executioner. Ella is watching from a balcony, celebrating my death as she did Mother's execution—with a cup of wine, wine laced with a grain of the Dust of Truth. And I know that she will not be long in following me to the ax. □



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## CONTRIBUTORS

**BRUCE BOSTON** WROTE "SPACER'S Compass," the poem that won the 1994 Rhysling Award from the Science Fiction Poetry Association. It was reprinted in *Nebula Awards 30*. His most recent publication was in the anthology *365 Short SF Stories*. **Ernest Hogan** has published two novels, *Cortex on Jupiter* and *High Asclepi*, both from Tor. His short fiction has appeared in *Amazing*, *Semiotext(e)* and elsewhere. Hogan also has a career as an illustrator, as readers of *SF Eye*, *Proud Flesh* and *Squashed Around* will know.

Just as we were going to press with this issue **Martha Soukup** became the proud owner of a Nebula Award. Her short story "A Defense of the Social Contracts," originally published here in the pages of *Science Fiction Age*, won this award, given annually by the members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. **Doug Anderson** has been focusing more on his video game work of late, and is currently working on backgrounds for an SF video game for *Far Interactive*. His most recent role-playing game cover was *FASA's Corporate Security* for their *Shadowrun* universe.

**Paul di Filippo** has just been nominated for awards from the British Science Fiction Association in two different categories. His "Mudpuppy Goes Uptown" from *Back Brain Review* is competing in the short story category, while "The Double Felix" from *Interzone* is competing for best novelette. He is at the halfway mark on his novel, *Fuzzy Dice*.

**Todd Lockwood** has seen his SF art appear in *IASFM*, *Analog* and *Dragon*. His art has also graced print ads and billboards for Coors, which is fitting, for he makes his home in the suburbs of Denver, where he lives with his wife, three kids, a cat, a rat and a rabbit.

**Mark Tiedemann** has made nineteen short story sales, with upcoming tales due to appear in *IASFM* and the Kevin Anderson edited *World of the Worlds* anthology. He also writes plays for the St. Louis Theatre Radio Group in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. **Gregory Feeley** published his first SF short story in 1977, and his first novel, *The Oregon Barons*, in 1990. His Elizabethan novella "Aweary of the Sun" will be

reprinted in the Ellen Datlow/Terri Windling anthology *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* from St. Martin's.

**Jeffery Kooistra** made a dazzling SF debut. His first published story, "Love, Dad," won the 1992 *Analog Readers' Poll* as the best short story of the year. During the day, Kooistra works on medical inventory control for a small metropolitan hospital.

**David Beck** studied at both the American Academy of Art and the Chicago Academy of Art, graduating in 1972. In his 16-year-free-lance career, his clients have included the NFL, *Playboy*, and McDonald's. His many movie posters include *Under Siege*.



Deborah Millitello



Scott McKay

**WITHIN SF, DON MAITZ** IS FAMED for his genre paintings, such as the covers for the original editions of Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun* series. But his art style is a familiar one even to most non-SF fans, thanks to his popular "Captain Morgan" art for a Seagram's rum label. His artwork is collected in *First Maltz: Selected Work by Don Maltz*. **Esther M. Friesner** has written over a dozen humorous fantasy novels, including *Gnome Man's Land* and *Hurry for Hellywood*. She holds a doctorate from Yale, and is a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism. She lives in Connecticut with her husband and two children.

**Scott McKay's** most recent short fiction appeared in *F&SF*, and he has two short works due out soon in the pages of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. His thriller *A Friend in Barcelona* was published by Harper Collins. He lives in Toronto with his wife and two children.

**Mike Resnick's** newest book is *A Miracle of Rare Design*. He is the winner of two Hugo Awards, and has been nominated for a total of nine Hugos and six Nebulas. He is 72 books and 100 plus stories into his SF career, yet he still considers himself a fan at heart. **Deborah Millitello** has sold thirteen stories since 1989 to such magazines as *Dragon* and *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, as well as contributing to such anthologies as *Bruce Coville's Book of Nightmares*, *Witchfantastic*, and *Sword and Sorceress 12*. □



Mark Tiedemann



Bruce Boston

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